



Narrator-in-Chief

The Narrative Rhetoric of Barack Obama

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PhD thesis

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Narrator-in-Chief: The Narrative Rhetoric of Barack Obama



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The photograph on the front page is from the White House Flickr page. It was taken April 27, 2009.

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Tell me a fact, and I will learn.
Tell me a truth, and I will believe.
But tell me a story,
and I will keep it in my heart forever.
(Native American Proverb)

Chapter 1. Introduction

“Elections are often won and lost on narratives. The candidate that can define the election and present an emotionally compelling narrative wins.” (Huffington Post, September 7, 2012)

During recent U.S. presidential elections, quotations such as the above were easy to come by in the news media. Even President Barack Obama himself, during the 2012 election cycle, commented on the role of a U.S. president as a teller of narratives: “... the nature of this office is also to tell a story to the American people that give them a sense of unity and purpose and optimism, especially during tough times.” (CBS interview, July 21, 2012¹) While the Romney campaign stated its opposition to the statement, the use of narratives by President George Bush and a recent statement from Republican Presidential hopeful Ted Cruz concerning the role of narratives in US politics² shows that presidents and candidates for the presidency from both of the major parties in American politics have embraced and partaken in the telling of narratives to the American people.

The extensive use of the term ‘narrative’ is not exclusive to the media coverage of U.S. presidential politics or the candidates’ own views of their potential job as storyteller for the nation. Rather, narrative as a term seems prevalent in a wide number of discourses and media. For instance, in 2013, the EU parliament funded a project called “A New Narrative of Europe” to find a way to reintroduce the values of the Union to the various nationalities of the European continent (Ioannides, 2013). Individual nations have attempted similar narrative projects, such as China did with the 2008 Olympic event, where the book *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* (Price, 2008) presents a number of essays on the competition between official narratives and counter-narratives surrounding the event (Price, 2008, p. 9).

In a Danish context, the incumbent Social Democratic party has been criticized for the absence of a larger narrative in their politics almost from its first day as head of the current Danish government coalition (Markussen, 2012). On May 13, 2014 the Danish News Television program *Deadline* invited political commentator Helle Ib and author Hanne Vibeke Holst to engage in a lengthy discussion on the personal narrative of opposition leader Lars Løkke Rasmussen in the light

¹ Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-reflects-on-his-biggest-mistake-as-president/>

² Republican Senator Ted Cruz recently stated the following: “In both law and politics, I think the essential battle is the meta-battle of framing the narrative.” (Toobin, 2014)

of a series of scandals (Deadline, 2014³). Danish historian Tom Buk-Sweinty stated in an interview, concerning the 150th anniversary of a significant military campaign for Denmark, that "we as people are coded to think in narratives," when describing his approach to writing about history (DR2 Morgen, May 24, 2013).

Narrative, or the parallel term 'story', has been embraced by many professions and in many academic fields and is used to describe a diverse number of discourses today. Narrative as a term has been expanded from representing mainly fictional content such as novels, films, and theatre performances. Today the term also represents encounters for people with the exhibitions of cultural institutions, a company's merchandise, a politician presenting his or her message in a public setting. Narratives are even used in the attempt to interpret people's own lives. Narrative as a term is therefore no longer tied to a text, but can relate to a great number of experiences. The use of the term has moved beyond the moment of narration as one narrative can move across several media platforms adapting to each new context in which it is told (Herman, 2009). From the daily tweets on twitter to the biographical tomes of famous figures, personal narratives are being studied regardless of their size and presumed level of detail (Georgakopoulou, 2007). In these different ways, the use of narrative as a term has been expanded in both its application both to content as well as to form.

In spite of the above examples of the diverse uses of narrative as a term, the elements of a narrative contain similarities across a wide spectrum. As human beings, we seek meaning in our everyday lives. In doing so, we often create meaningful sequences and patterns of the events we experience: "Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change..." (Herman, 2009, p. 2) In the structuring process of creating a narrative, fictional or non-fictional, there is an appeal that relates to the desire for comprehending the world around us, as has been pointed out in research on narrative psychology for instance: "Folk psychology is about human agents doing things on the basis of their beliefs and desires, striving for goals, meeting obstacles which they best or which best them, all of this extended over time." (Bruner, 1990, pp. 42-43) Time is an essential factor when considering the diverse uses of narrative as a term. People often draw events together in a structured sequence, which over time allows them to make more sense of the period of time experienced, both as individuals and as collective groups on a larger national and historical scale (White, 1973). Two important elements in this process are the *sequence* of how events occur and how these events are placed in *relationship* to each other

³ Available at: <http://www.dr.dk/tv/se/deadline/deadline-616>

(Crossley, 2000). It is the link between events that is important to comprehend to establish the larger image of one's worldview and one's self as a character in this world. The same can be said for the importance of a nation's identity for its citizens. It is important for a nation's citizens to understand the larger narrative about their country in order to create a sense of a shared identity (Anderson, 1991).

In this way, a narrative can be an important element in creating commonality among people through identification with people and places, as well as shared values. A narrative can establish links between events over time through a stronger sense of overall coherence. Narrative then is attributed with positive values in communication practices such as moral clarity (MacIntyre, 1981), coherence (Fisher, 1984; Iversen, 2013), and identification (McClure, 2009). Narrative in connection with political communication, however, is also used as a term to describe the process of spinning, of painting over the truth, giving way to style over substance, or even outright propaganda (Salmon, 2010).

With the rise of the political commentariat, the narrative, or the story, has also come to represent the agenda behind politics – a prepared script presented to the public. The use of narrative as a term in news media comes faster and faster, where the need for simultaneous 'bigger picture' comments leads to an almost immediate narrativization of events as they unfold. Peter Brooks argued in his article "Stories Abounding" (2001) that this rush by both the media and politicians to present a compelling and complete narrative of an event should be seen as an attempt by different political rivals to define one dominant narrative as "a pre-emptive strike against dissenting opinions." (Brooks, 2001) While narrative as a term can be used to define and clarify the events taking place, there is still an ongoing competition between different narratives in presenting the 'truth'.

In this dissertation's view, narrative as a term should therefore be considered in light of the narrator's intent, rather than the term itself being assigned positive or negative connotations, much in the same way as rhetoric itself.

Presidential Rhetoric and the Use of Narratives

The increasing use of narrative as a term, from pure fiction to factually based statements, presents a number of challenges in understanding what exactly a narrative is and is not. Yet the pervasive use of narrative as a term in modern-day discourse also presents many fruitful opportunities to consider how the narrative form influences different communication processes as

well as the content of the narratives. This dissertation seeks to delve into the usage of narrative as a term within rhetorical scholarship and rhetorical discourse, and help clarify and nuance the discussion of narrative as a term in one field of research in particular, that of presidential rhetoric.

The speeches of a U.S. president are, in rhetorical terms, arguably some of the most traditional texts one could study today. The speeches are most often a statesman's address with a particular audience in mind, and the speeches often have the goal of presenting their message in an eloquent manner. Yet speeches by the candidate and his prominent supporters are also an important part of contemporary presidential campaigns that work across several media platforms. The context in which these speeches are given has changed dramatically, from George Washington's first Inaugural Address in 1789 to the online streaming of President Obama's 'enhanced versions' of the State of the Union address. Because of these historical, contextual developments, there is also a need to reconsider the approach of rhetorical criticism to the speeches' contents when analyzing the presence of narratives in the speeches. Precisely because of the proliferation of outlets and media voices, the speeches of a candidate function as spearhead moments for the messages of the campaigns, and the speeches provide a better picture of the general message of campaign (Jarvis, 2004). The speeches are therefore important because they represent an introduction to the candidate. The words of a candidate/president are part of a larger image, yet they remain a distilled product of this image and valuable material for analysis when considering the intended messages of both campaign and presidency⁴.

During the years of Barack Obama's presence on the national stage of U.S. politics, the use of narrative as a term has become prevalent not only in the media and in campaign language, but also in the academic field dealing with presidential rhetoric and campaigning (Rowland & Jones 2007; Hammack, 2010; Hammer, 2010; Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010; Murphy, 2011; Rowland, 2011). As far as presidential rhetoric goes, there has not been a similar emphasis on the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric, since the scholarly research done on President Ronald Reagan's speeches in the 1980s and the debate and development of Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1982; Fisher, 1984; Lucaites & Condit, 1985; Carpenter, 1986; Rushing 1986; Lewis, 1987; Warnick, 1987).

⁴ Questions of the authorship of campaigns and presidential speeches often arise, since the candidate and the president do not have the time to write all of the speeches given on the campaign trail and from the White House. Yet I would argue, as others have done before, that the public speech act of the candidate or president creates ownership of the messages presented. Once the words have been uttered by the president, they become part of the presidency and of the presidential archive for researchers to study.

The Role of the Presidential Speech Today

During his first bid for the presidency, Barack Obama was initially held up as a role model for political oratory. But subsequently, during his first administration period, he has been criticized for the contrast between the words of his speeches and the political follow-through. This developing criticism of President Obama is worth studying in itself, since the arguments presented for and against President Barack Obama in scholarly research show that rhetorical choices and actions always relate to the situation in which they are given and are not independent of their context. This relationship between speech and context is also reflected in one critique of President Obama. In the texts, there is an emphasis on his political agenda having been dependent on actors not under his control⁵.

Because of this perceived increase in the contrast between words and actions, Barack Obama also represents a relevant case concerning the image of the presidency itself, when considering the role of presidential rhetoric as a source of influence on the presidency. The question whether a speech given by a president can actually be said to have any political influence is a central discussion within the field of presidential studies.

At a conference in Washington D.C. in 2013⁶, international and U.S. speechwriters gathered to discuss the value of speeches in relation to political leadership. The conference opened with a keynote address by President Bill Clinton's former speechwriter Jeff Shesol⁷. When discussing what role speeches play for the president today, Shesol suggested looking at two specific aspects of the presidency: firstly, the role of "Educator-in-chief" where the president educates the people on a subject by speaking about it. The role of "Educator-in-chief"⁸ is focused on a descriptive quality, where connections between events are made clearer and drawn into the national conversation within a specific frame of view set by the president⁹. This manner of communication often relates to the

⁵ The most frequently used example of this opposition to President Obama's politics is the Republican majority in the House of Representatives from the 2010 midterm elections and onward.

⁶ The Ragan conference in Washington D.C. March 19-20, 2013

⁷ Shesol has written two historical books on the American presidency: *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade* (1998), and *Supreme Power: Franklin Roosevelt vs. The Supreme Court* (2010). Based on the insights in the first of these books, he was asked to become a speech writer for Bill Clinton in the White House in the 1990s.

⁸ Other scholars have also referenced this role as educator for the president, including Mary Stuckey in *The President as Interpreter-in-Chief* (Stuckey, 1991, p. 45).

⁹ Here Shesol used President Franklin Roosevelt and the president's speeches on World War II as an example. Where most Americans in the war's first year were against American participation, President Roosevelt over time, through his speeches, built an argument for why the United States at one point had to involve itself in the war: To begin with, as "an

framing ability of a narrative plot. The second aspect Shesol mentioned as essential for the president's role as a speaker today is the ability to articulate national values. Rhetorical scholars writing about this role of the presidency argue that the president often finds these values in America's past (Jamieson & Campbell, 2008 pp. 36-39). The president uses them to show the nation its path to the future, sometimes with a redefinition of Americans' image of themselves¹⁰.

These rhetorical roles help to advance what can be described as the 'national conversation' on chosen subjects in the United States. At a minimum, these roles give the conversation a clearer focus through the President's speaker position. Presidential speeches can therefore still be seen as highly important for the president. The two aspects Shesol suggested looking at in the president's speeches, emphasize an epideictic aspect in the presidential role, where the president is removed from the political fray and instead functions as a national figure to educate the people on, and thereby sustain, values in society. While this is an idealized version of the role of the chief executive, which does not take political competitions with Congress and the Supreme Court into account, this dissertation finds the epideictic elements of presidential rhetoric highly relevant when considering what role narrative rhetoric plays for the presidency.

Of the three traditional genres described by Aristotle (judicial, epideictic, and deliberative), epideictic speech is described as focused on determining what is noble about a character through a speech often given at a ceremonial occasion. The role of epideictic speech has been sought expanded on in academic literature, where particularly Celeste Condit's article *The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations* (1985) is relevant to this dissertation's view of epideictic

arsenal of democracy" (Roosevelt, 1940) until the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. When the attack occurred, Roosevelt had already presented through his speeches a variety of ideas about the enemy Americans were facing. (Roosevelt, 1940; 1941) He also gave Americans a frame work through which to understand why the Second World War was a necessary war to fight. "The Four Freedoms" presented in his State of the Union speech from 1941 are perhaps the clearest example. Similarly, it has been pointed out in several studies that President George W. Bush after the September 11th attack used his speeches as president to educate the population on why the United States was first threatened by Iraq and subsequently why it was necessary to invade the country and depose its leader Saddam Hussein in 2003. One can argue that these two examples show both the valuable and problematic aspects of the educational aspect of the presidency. But in both cases the speeches served as an aid in advancing the respective administration's agenda.

¹⁰ President Woodrow Wilson, for instance, used the crisis of World War I to describe Americans in a new light. President Wilson used his speaker position as president to speak of Americans as being part of the world, rather than set apart from it, communicating that this role as citizens of the world (Dorsey, 2002) came with a responsibility toward other democratic nations. In this manner, President Wilson formulated new policies for the United States through a description of its people. President Abraham Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg, where he described the American Civil War as a chance for the United States to live up to the Constitution's declared goal of equality for all, using the dead to instruct the values of the living. President Franklin Roosevelt presented his activist view of government in connection with the economic crisis in the 1930s, showing that government had a clear and beneficial role to play in peoples' lives. In presidential speeches since then, President Roosevelt's view of government has been used both to support and oppose government.

speech as a concept. Condit found that previous descriptions of epideictic speech as a macro-genre focused in particular on praise or blame. These descriptions were lacking in explaining how the speech genre was put to use by politicians for instance. Condit's examples of speeches are not directly described as presidential. Yet almost all of the examples can be said to be a large part of the traditional speeches that presidents give, and they indeed are synonymous with the presidency, such as inaugural addresses.

Drawing on the work done on genre theory by Miller (1984) and Jamieson & Campbell (1982), Condit suggested a greater emphasis on the "function" of the genre as much as the form of the genre. This would enable a better understanding and interpretation of the content of a speech. Epideictic speech should therefore not be seen as an end in itself – as an "art for arts' sake" perspective" (Condit, 1985 p. 286). Condit instead suggested three functional pairs for epideictic speeches, where the pairing of functions refers to the perspective of the speaker and the audience respectively on the functions.

The three pairs are described as first, "Definition and Understanding functions." (Condit, 1985, p. 288) This pair of functions serves the purpose of explaining a social world to the audience, where the speaker seeks to achieve the "power to define." (Condit, 1985, p. 288) The second functional pair is "Shaping and Sharing Community", which is focused on establishing a communal aspect: "A sense of community is developed and maintained in large part through public speaking and hearing of the community heritage and identity." (Condit, 1985, p. 289) The purpose for the speaker is often to address changes that have occurred and "...help discover what the event means to the community, and what the community will come to be in the face of the new event." (Condit, 1985, p. 289) This second function also reflects to a large extent the purpose of terms such as narratives and constitutive rhetoric as understood by this dissertation. The third functional pairing for epideictic speeches is "Display and Entertainment," a pairing that "...offers speakers the opportunity for creativity by releasing them from concern with specific issues and charging them to take on broader vistas." (Condit, 1985, p. 290) While all three functions may not always be present in epideictic speech, they all serve the speaker as a way to achieve "communal definition." (Condit, 1985, p. 291) Essentially the epideictic speech and its functions for Condit are focused on establishing and expressing a shared sense of identity for the audience to the speech. With President Obama we will see that the "communal definition" is not only a means to get a message across, but also the message itself. For President Obama the communal aspect of epideictic speech is a goal in itself, because it is the first step to achieve a platform from which to understand different groups'

political goals, and for these groups to join together in a shared purpose. This is President Obama's intention as he seeks to draw together different communities within *and* outside the United States.

The narrative with its interpretive and descriptive quality seems well suited for epideictic speech. In trying to reach the broad American audience and either educate its members on an issue or interpret an event, the president can present himself from his more ceremonial side, and in his speeches present seemingly common held perceptions of the United States through narratives. These narratives often have both the achievement of *kairos* and longevity as a goal. They focus on both catching the mood of the moment as well as defining traditions and a 'deeper' level of timeless national values.

In spite of renewed interest during the Obama presidency in the connection between narratives and presidential rhetoric, contemporary scholars have pointed out the lack of research on the subject of the use of narratives in political rhetoric (Iversen, 2013, 2014; Till, 2013). The writing that *has* been done on candidate and President Barack Obama and his use of narratives often falls prey to a broad use of narrative as a term. This broad use lends itself to the critique of the term's value in rhetorical scholarship. Peter Brooks points out the problem with this broad definition, while describing the proliferation of the use of the term. "The problem, however, is that the very promiscuity of the idea of narrative may have rendered the concept useless. The proliferation and celebration of the concept of narrative haven't been matched by a concurrent spread of attention to its analysis." (Brooks, 2001) Narrative is used as a term without a detailed look at its application and how the term can be used more clearly in rhetorical criticism. For instance, considering *what* a narrative actually consists of. One of this dissertation's objectives is therefore to suggest a closer look at how to use narrative as a term when considering the scholarly rhetorical critique of President Obama's rhetoric. The specifications of the term should subsequently enable a more nuanced understanding of narrative as a term and its use in the rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric in general. Having considered these specifications of narrative as a term, the dissertation then explores how President Barack Obama himself uses narratives as a speaker as evidenced in his memoir¹¹ and speeches.

¹¹ *Dreams From My Father* (1995)

President Barack Obama as a Case Study

“I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.”

Barack Obama, 2004 DNC¹² speech

President Barack Obama’s political rise after his 2004 DNC speech and during the 2008 Presidential campaign can be attributed to a number of factors: a specific political climate following both President George W. Bush’s presidency (2001-2009) and the onset of the Economic crisis (2007-); the Obama campaign’s ability to raise money from smaller donors, its use of online media, as well as a return to a more grassroots-oriented campaign strategy which emphasized the personal contact between volunteers and voters (Nielsen, 2012).

Yet at the frontline of the 2008 campaign was also Barack Obama himself and his skills as a political speaker. From his 2004 DNC speech and onward, Barack Obama was praised for elevating political rhetoric through a classical understanding of oratory reminiscent of President John F. Kennedy. He was also described as having the strategic communication skills of President Ronald Reagan. Barack Obama’s words, more than his political accomplishments, were part of what defined his candidacy in 2008, along with the contrast in his speaking style when compared with that of his predecessor President George W. Bush.

The speeches and the memoir of Barack Obama will be used as case studies for this dissertation. These texts will be used to discuss Barack Obama’s own approach to narration. The texts will also be analyzed to show how his background, a geographically diverse upbringing, and professional work as a community organizer, has influenced him as a speaker. Finally, the influence of the traditions of the presidency, the modern use of mass media, and the evolution towards a more personalized and epideictic presidency will be considered.

Because of his open reflection about the use of narratives in both a presidential and personal context, President and candidate Obama make a relevant case study when considering regarding the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric. In his speeches, Barack Obama’s emphasis on narratives is illustrative to Kenneth Burke’s emphasis on identification and consubstantiality (Burke, 1950). Barack Obama’s goal has been to create a shared identity between himself as speaker and the audience, and storytelling in and of itself has been a theme of his rhetorical discourse. Barack

¹² DNC: Democratic National Convention

Obama achieved identification with the many voters in the United States in the 2008 election through a number of both personal and traditional narrative themes that linked his own background to the experiences of individual, ordinary Americans, as well as to a broader national vision of the United States' past, present, and future.

Barack Obama was not the first candidate or president to make use of such personal and traditional narrative themes in his speeches. Yet the analysis of his use of narratives in this dissertation's rhetorical critique of his presidential rhetoric will show how he differs from previous presidents in a number of ways. First, Barack Obama approaches the use of narratives in a more conscious and self-revealing way. Second, his personal narrative is a reflection of a development towards personal stories focused more on inner struggles rather than confronting the outer challenges for the candidates for the office of the presidency. Third, Barack Obama balances a historical consciousness of the nation's past and the traditions of the presidency with the changing demographics in the United States, which gave him the opportunity to include groups of Americans previously not recognized as part of "we, the people" in presidential rhetoric. Fourth, Barack Obama seeks to establish a similar relationship of inclusion and "communal definition" (Condit, 1985) with the rest of the world post 9/11, and in contrast to the Bush administration's foreign policies.

There are both benefits and challenges to working with a subject that 'produces' new material every day during the project's period of research¹³. Several of the first U.S. presidents can be described as reluctant public speakers (Stuckey, 1991 pp. 14-15), and they tried to give as few speeches as possible while in office. A modern U.S. president in contrast gives hundreds of speeches a year, and President Obama, with 411 speeches in his first year as president¹⁴, is no exception. This has resulted in abundant textual material from which to gather evidence and examples. Throughout the dissertation's period of development (2011-2014), scholars have also developed their approach to President Obama's rhetoric. In the articles and conference presentations reviewed in this dissertation, scholars have re-focused their arguments from optimistic predictions to more critical reviews (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014) and have begun to speak of different periods in Barack Obama's rhetoric, such as 'pre-presidential Obama' or "the early Obama" (Till, 2013). The developing disappointment in President Obama is often related to this temporal segmentation of his

¹³ One teacher on the subject of presidential rhetoric advised his students never to study the words of a president who was still breathing and able to give another speech.

¹⁴ Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/obamas-first-year-by-the-numbers/>

speeches, particularly when his political accomplishments have been contrasted with the way his rhetoric inspired his audiences to believe the U.S. political system capable of achieving more than it has accomplished. Yet throughout his first term as president and during his reelection campaign of 2012, Barack Obama held a higher personal approval rating than his political challengers for the office of president. President Obama is therefore also an interesting speaker to write about since as a person he has been able to maintain a high level of likeability, even when his policies have gone sour or when there have been setbacks for his presidency, such as the debate on the Affordable Care Act.¹⁵ This contrast has forced him to use his speaker position to present an acceptable view of his presidency in light of the crises that have challenged both his policies as well as his narratives.

This dissertation is aware of many of these negative policy developments for the Obama administration. The more controversial policies have led to an increased criticism of President Obama. These policies include his use of drones against terrorists, the lack of openness in his administration towards the news media, and his inability to contribute to improved working relations between the two major political parties in Congress. The emphasis of the dissertation will be on the rhetorical tasks that Barack Obama as President has accomplished more successfully, such as formulating and developing an identity for the American people for the 21st century, addressing the conditions of the United States' standing in the world post 9/11, the Economic crisis, and serving as a moral barometer for where the United States is heading on issues such as gay rights, gender equality and economic inequality.

In the media, the broad narrative of Barack Obama's presidency has gone from a euphoric rise of hope and change to an overflow of disappointment. It has come to a point in 2014 where commentators polemically suggest that the years with Barack Obama in office have been a complete waste if the Affordable Care Act is not carried through in a successful way¹⁶. This approach to Barack Obama as a politician overlooks a number of things that are relevant to consider in narrative terms. When writing about a president's rhetoric, it seems mandatory that there be some kind of judgment of the leadership involved. While this often focuses on results, there is also a consideration of how a president speaks which moves beyond political goals and speaks instead toward a vision of the country and a moral conversation. President Obama has been a president who

¹⁵ Overview of poll concerning Barack Obama's approval rating available at: http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/president_obama_job_approval-1044.html

¹⁶ Ulrich Bie (Chief Analyst at Nykredit) suggested a complete lack of achievements at a debate on the first five years of Barack Obama's Presidency. The debate was hosted by kongressen.com on January 20th 2014. (Kongressen.com is a network and website focused on U.S. politics)

by contemporary media and scholarship has been judged wanting in many of his political agendas but one who may still have participated in fundamentally changing the nation he has been set to govern, in ways that have yet to become fully apparent.

Narrative studies researchers (Georgakopoulou, 2007; Herman, 2009) reference the distinction between an “etic and an “emic” approach to the use of narrative as a term in research. The etic approach is to determine how the term can be used in the scholarly analysis of a text. The emic approach is a description of how practitioners use and view the term. David Herman explains the distinction in this manner: “... etic approaches create descriptive categories that are used by analysts to sift through patterns in linguistic data, whether or not those categories correspond to differences perceived as meaningful by users of the language being analyzed, emic approaches seek to capture differences that language users themselves orient to as meaningful.” (Herman, p. 3, 2009) It is important to present this distinction here, because the distinction describes the two approaches this dissertation takes to the use of narrative as a term. Maintaining this distinction in the work done on the use of narrative as a term, the dissertation seeks to understand both how researchers of presidential rhetoric use narrative as a term, as well as how Barack Obama as a ‘presidential practitioner’ uses narratives.

The Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of the dissertation is to show how ‘narrative’ can be seen as a relevant term to be used within rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric, in particular when considering the campaigns and presidency of Barack Obama. This connection between narrative theory and presidential rhetoric should help clarify the use of narrative as a term within rhetorical criticism focused on presidential rhetoric. The dissertation’s focus primarily on Barack Obama as a case study, rather than on the rhetoric of a broad number of presidents is intentional in order to establish a better understanding of a particular aspect of President Barack Obama’s rhetoric, namely, his use and stated views on narratives in his memoir, and in his major speeches as a candidate and president. The theoretical approach of this dissertation will, however, suggest that the use of narratives in speech texts, and between speeches at a broader referential level, is a significant part of any public speaker’s rhetoric when he speaks to a national audience, not something unique to the rhetoric of Barack Obama. The guideline in this research will be to answer the question:

How can narrative as a term help create nuance in the understanding of Barack Obama as a public speaker?

The core of this dissertation's case studies is this: to regard President Barack Obama as both the *narrator* and the *narrated*, and examine the relationship between the two: How does Barack Obama understand his role as president and candidate, and how does he narrate the stories of himself, the American people, and the nation of the United States.

The supporting questions that will be answered in this connection are: what role does narrative play for a president and a presidential candidate in their rhetoric? How has Barack Obama as writer and speaker combined traditional narrative themes of presidential rhetoric with his own personal narrative themes? How do these personal and presidential narrative themes change from one election cycle to another for a candidate/president?

The connection between narrative as a term and the presidency will be presented through three chapters focusing on three narrative themes for a candidate/ president: 1) The narrative of self as established through the narration of a personal past 2) The narrative of the people as established through the use of constitutive rhetoric, and 3) The narrative of the nation as established through the appeal to the public memory of events from U.S. and world history. Through these presidential narrative themes, the candidate/president attempts to shape a consistent vision of the United States as understood by his candidacy/presidency: a narrative arc. A fourth case study chapter will consider the development of such a narrative arc across political campaigns. The arc is created initially through narrative identification with the structures and themes of a candidate's narrative and subsequently upheld by internal coherence in the narrative as well as a fidelity to the world view of the audience, which relates to Walter Fisher's concepts in connection with his narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1984). The goal of the progression of the narrative themes is to achieve narrative longevity, which means that the narrative over time is still seen as believable and appealing for its audience to follow and identify with.

Theoretical Foundation and Method of the Dissertation

The two main scholarly areas of reference for the readings in the dissertation are the fields of narrative studies and presidential rhetoric. It is from the foundation of these two fields of research that the relationship between narrative as a term and other concepts such as persona, constitutive rhetoric, public memory, and campaign rhetoric are established.

The primary material for analysis for the dissertation's case studies will be selected campaign speeches and presidential speeches given by Barack Obama, as well as his wife Michelle Obama¹⁷. The rhetorical critique will include an analysis of Barack Obama's memoir *Dreams from My Father* (1995). The choice of speeches and the memoir as the main source material has been made with an acknowledgement of the many components that go into a presidential campaign and the communication practices behind the presidency. Yet while the use of social media by the Obama campaign and presidency has been lauded, Barack Obama as a candidate also reignited both audience interest in the political speech as an event to attend, and media interest in a speech's ability to reach a broad audience and establish momentum for an entire presidential campaign in 2008. The candidate's/ president's speeches are of course not completely removed from the strategic agenda of the campaigns, but because of the traditions of the presidential office and the position of the speaker, as well as the historic context he is speaking into, there is still a sense of piercing the news cycle in the speeches that should be considered.

The speeches that are analyzed have been chosen because of the public's high awareness of them. This awareness stems from either the traditions of the presidency, in the case of Inaugurals and State of the Union speeches, or because the speeches have come to represent central statements for the Obama administration's first four years, such as Barack Obama's own role as president, or the role of the United States in the world. In this way the texts chosen can be described as 'tent pole speeches', speech situations that have been part of shaping the overall message of Barack Obama's campaigns or his first period as president.

The approach to the artifacts used in the dissertation will be through a close reading of the texts. James Jasinski describes a component in close reading that lends itself to a narrative understanding of rhetorical texts: "...the rhetorical text possesses the same general type of complexity, nuance, and subtlety found in other art forms." (Jasinski, 2001, p. 92) This description parallels the intention with this dissertation to present a more detailed attention to the subtleties of narrative elements in the texts studied, such as the use and interaction of characters, settings, and events to achieve coherent plots and story arcs in the narratives. Through a close reading of the texts, it is expected that both the traditional presidential narrative themes described above and elements of the narrative structures considered in the following theoretical chapter of the dissertation will be present. Examples of a conscious contemplation given to the narration process itself by Barack Obama will

¹⁷ The speeches of Michelle Obama at the DNCs in 2008 and 2012 will be analyzed in one of the case-study based chapters.

also be presented. Finally, differences in the narrative themes in the speeches from the two Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012 will be presented as well, in order to discuss how narratives change over time. Narrative coherence for a presidential speaker is inevitably challenged by the four years that lie between elections, which suggests a necessary restructuring of the content in the presidential and personal narrative themes. The speeches of President and candidate Obama have therefore also been chosen in an attempt to establish comparable speech situations over time. The DNC conventions during the 2008 and 2012 campaigns for instance.

The field of academic and journalistic writing on President Barack Obama, as well as the number of speeches given by the president, is constantly evolving. This dissertation is therefore placed within this ongoing research, which deals with President Obama's overall message framing and his emphasis on describing the United States through his understanding of its people, history, as well as his own background. The writing in this dissertation should be seen as a contribution to these issues as they develop in connection with the different periods of the Obama presidency.

Overview of Chapters in the Dissertation

The general structure of the dissertation consists of two main theoretical chapters dealing with narrative rhetoric and presidential rhetoric respectively. The theoretical chapters are followed by four case study chapters relating to the rhetoric of President Barack Obama.

The first theoretical chapter on narrative rhetoric initially presents a brief synopsis of a number of basic elements of narrative. These elements are referenced throughout the overview of narrative studies and used to discuss how the study of narratives, and the understanding of what actually constitutes a narrative, has evolved as a response to scholarly interests and new distribution platforms, such as social online media (Page, 2012). The concepts drawn from narrative studies are then connected with research done on both rhetorical aspects of narratives (Phelan and Rabinowitz, 2012) and narratives as rhetorical arguments or discourses (Fisher, 1984; Lucaites & Condit, 1985; Rowland, 1987; McClure, 2009; and Iversen, 2013). Finally, the political use of narratives is addressed more specifically by presenting recent critiques of the term 'storytelling'. This final section of the chapter should be seen as a bridge between the umbrella concept of narrative rhetoric and the study of presidential rhetoric. The overall purpose with the first theoretical chapter is to establish an understanding of narrative as a term, so that it can be used in greater detail in the rhetorical critique of the speeches and memoir of a presidential speaker such as Barack Obama.

The second theoretical chapter will illustrate how the elements of a narrative structure and the content of narrative themes are relevant for the study of presidential rhetoric, and how narrative as a term has previously been applied in research done on presidential rhetoric. To set the framework for the dissertation's work with presidential rhetoric, a brief history of the development of the U.S. presidency and the relevance of narratives in this development will be discussed with an eye on the dual emic and etic approach. The chapter then turns to a more modern president, Ronald Reagan, as a precursor to Barack Obama's contemporary approach to the use of narratives, as well as in the scholarly interest in the term. The comparison between the literature on the narrative rhetoric of President Reagan and that of candidate and President Barack Obama will help clarify the need for a more nuanced use of narrative as a term in contemporary studies of Barack Obama's use of narratives. What should be drawn from this second theoretical chapter are both examples of the traditional narratives presidents have used over time under the presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation, and the more personal narrative themes of individual presidents. These personal narrative themes have either contrasted with the traditional presidential themes or developed them further.

The two theoretical chapters are followed by four chapters dealing with case studies of Barack Obama's use of narratives. The use of case studies, combined with an ongoing introduction of complementary theories to narrative theory for these cases, is an attempt to gradually present the argument for the relevant role narrative as a term can play in rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric. The first case-based chapter deals with the *narrative of self* through Barack Obama's memoir and early speeches (2004-2008). The chapter will initially describe the use of narrative elements such as character, setting, and plot in Barack Obama's memoir, which he subsequently chose to focus on in his campaign speeches as well. Secondly, the chapter also broadly compares Barack Obama's own memoir with other biographies written about his personal background. The intention here is to address Barack Obama's conscious approach to the *act* of narrating his personal past, his role as narrator. This is to show that Barack Obama has shaped and selected experiences from his life to present, first in book form and later in presidential rhetoric (as other politicians have done before him), a means of identification with the American people through narrative. The difference between Barack Obama and other politicians is that Barack Obama acknowledges the narrative process itself and its subjective pitfalls.

The second case-based chapter focuses on the *narrative of the people* as expressed in major presidential speech genres used by President Barack Obama. Via the narrative aspects of

constitutive rhetoric and the traditions of the Inaugural Address and the State of the Union speech genres, President Barack Obama has attempted to create a common understanding of the identity of the American people and their role as citizens. This chapter focuses on how President Obama manages an inclusion of minority Americans in an American national identity in more direct ways than previous presidents have been able to do in similar traditional speech situations. However, he does so at the cost of other groups of Americans, who may fail to locate themselves within President Obama's suggested vision of the United States' shared identity. This lack of a full inclusion of a people continues to problematize the use of constitutive rhetoric, when the audience is as large as the population of the United States.

The third case-based chapter deals with the *narrative of the nation*. Through a focus on a number of President Obama's foreign policy speeches given in the settings of Cairo (2009), Oslo (2009), and Berlin (2008) speech situations are presented where President Obama has had to both establish the United States as a nation, and his own legitimacy as the United States' first diplomat, in front of foreign audiences. An appeal to public memory through historic references has often been a part of President Barack Obama's rhetoric in these speeches. In this way, President Obama adheres to a presidential tradition of referencing the history of the nation and its allies. In some cases presidents have even tried to bend or restructure the nation's history to signify a new path forward in the relationships with foreign powers. In this chapter it will be argued that the use of events from both American and world history in the foreign policy speeches of President Barack Obama resembles that of linking plot points in a narrative. The emphasis in these plot points is often on moments of crisis that have set the United States and its allies on new and more tightly connected courses, or the event has functioned as a reaffirmation of the mission trope of U.S. presidential rhetoric. History in these speeches by President Obama is given an active presence and drawn into the present via narrative structures.

The fourth and final case-based chapter deals with some of the more overall changes in the personal and presidential narrative themes of Barack Obama between his two presidential campaigns. The chapter will describe how a narrative is developed over time without losing its internal coherence and the fidelity it has achieved with its audience in the first place. These changes are illustrated through an analysis of the speeches from the Democratic Party Conventions in 2008 and 2012. The DNC represents a highly structured event in the campaign cycle, where the speeches of the speakers are directed toward a specific purpose of exemplifying the persona and ethos of the candidate and the party he represents. The election in 2012 represented significant new challenges

for President Obama as a candidate¹⁸. The analysis of the convention speeches will consider how President Obama addressed the re-election cycle, and how he attempted to connect the four years in office to the two presidential campaigns as chapters in a broader narrative arc. This chapter of the dissertation will also function as a summation of the previous three case-based chapters with an emphasis on the interplay between the three presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation.

A final chapter summarizes the findings of the dissertation, discusses their implications, and gives suggestions for further research on the Obama presidency, as well as suggests how the dissertation's approach to narrative rhetoric can be used to discuss political rhetoric outside of the U.S. presidency. The dissertation has been written with a close chronological proximity to the case material studied. The question of what the dissertation's findings indicate for the use of narrative as a term in rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric can therefore be more readily answered in this conclusion than what the practical implications of Barack Obama's use of narratives in his presidential rhetoric will be for the U.S. presidency. For instance, whether future politicians will place as great an emphasis on their personal character and background as was the case in the 2008 and 2012 elections? However, indications of, for instance, potential presidential candidates attempting to embody the emerging ethnic diversity of the United States population have already presented themselves¹⁹. President Obama's use of narratives still present a number of interesting issues for the presidency as a whole, which is also presented in this final chapter.

¹⁸ After being in office for more than five years, President Obama had not succeeded in forging a post-partisan coalition. The unemployment numbers were still high, there had been an increase in the use of drones in military operations, and the major political achievement of his administration, a health care reform, was not popular with a majority of voters. In spite of poor economic numbers and polls showing that the majority of voters believed President Obama's opponent, Governor Mitt Romney, would be better at fixing the economy, President Obama lead in one category throughout the election cycle. That was in the poll on who was the more likeable of the two candidates. The Obama campaign seized on this difference and the 2012 campaign seemed to be as much about the two candidates' personalities as their politics.

¹⁹ As Republican Senator Marco Rubio has already attempted to do in his speeches and his memoir *An American Son* (2012)

Chapter 2. Narrative Rhetoric: An Umbrella Term for the Study of Narratives in Rhetorical Situations

In the book *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1993 ed.) mythologist and lecturer Joseph Campbell wrote of a number of shared narrative elements that occurred in stories and myths across cultures and time. These elements formed a structure described by Campbell as “The Adventure of The Hero.” (Campbell, 1993, pp. 49-) The structure, according to Campbell, forms the backbone in all storytelling practices because of its emphasis on moral lessons learned, which informs both the protagonist in the story and the story’s audience. While this dissertation does not put forth as audacious a claim as to point to universal structures of political storytelling across cultures and time, the intention with the dissertation *is* to analyze more closely the actual content and structure of the narratives present in the rhetoric of the U.S. Presidency; more particularly, President Obama’s use of characters, settings, plot structures and himself as a narrator. The intention with this chapter is to show how theories and concepts from the field of narrative studies are relevant to include in this dissertation in order to better understand the rhetoric of Barack Obama, and through his example also presidential rhetoric.

Initially, four basic narrative elements will be presented in order to set the stage for the discussion of what elements a narrative is composed of. Text books from fields traditionally dealing with narrative form²⁰, and scholarly narrative studies done in fields less obviously connected to narrative form²¹, share similarities in the basic elements used to describe what a narrative is. The basic narrative elements presented here are meant to reflect this commonality in the different areas of research. The description of the basic elements focuses on how they will be understood as terms throughout the dissertation, and how the elements should be understood when used in a rhetorical context. After these initial working definitions are conceptualized, a review of the general field of narrative studies is presented to give a sense of how recent developments within these studies can help define the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric. The focus for these research developments also suggests both a need and a pathway towards the use of narrative as a term in the research done on political rhetoric (Iversen, 2014). A key development that is drawn upon in this dissertation is the study of narratives in shorter forms such as “Small Stories” (Georgakopoulou, 2007). The reason for presenting the understanding of the basic elements initially before the broader overview of theoretical developments in narrative studies is that although the

²⁰ Such as film, theatre, and literary studies.

²¹ Such as psychology, architecture, and medicine, where narrative instead is used as a way to re-imagine research.

elements are present in almost all discussions on narratives, their purpose and nature are not settled upon. The initial presentation in the beginning of this chapter therefore seeks to clarify how the basic elements will be viewed throughout this dissertation.

The overview of the relevant theoretical developments in narrative studies will transition into a description of the work of Professor James Phelan. Phelan has collaborated with a number of scholars on “Project Narrative”²² at Ohio State University, and has sought to introduce rhetorical theory into narrative studies. The focus in this section of the chapter will be on what Phelan describes as rhetorical narratives. Phelan’s ‘bridging’ approach, between rhetoric and narrative, will be an important stepping stone to help the dissertation conceptualize relevant elements within narrative studies when considering rhetorical texts.

Rhetoricians have already dealt with narrative as a term from the rhetorical side of the bridge, particularly in the debate that arose around Walter Fisher’s introduction of “the narrative paradigm” in the 1980s. Since then scholars have attempted to ‘resurrect’ the narrative paradigm, or incorporate the concepts from the paradigm in their studies of the use of narratives in rhetoric (McClure, 2009; Iversen, 2013). While the debate on Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm never settled on an operational approach to narrative rhetoric, the debate holds many valuable suggestions on how to understand the elements of narrative rhetoric. In particular, how narratives enable a speaker to more easily establish “identification” and “consubstantiality” with his audience, to reference the terms of Kenneth Burke (Burke, 1950), whom Fisher also used as one of his starting points in his own understanding of narratives. The other benefit of revisiting the debate on Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm are the constraints presented on the broad use of narrative as a term by scholars such as Lucaites and Condit (1985). The dissertation sides with these constraints in many ways, when attempting to clarify the use of narrative as a term in rhetorical criticism of presidential speeches.

As a preliminary conclusion²³ to this discussion of what defines a narrative, and how narrative rhetoric can be seen as an umbrella term, a presentation of the more particular narrative themes of U.S. presidential rhetoric and the narrative structures used by U.S. presidents in their speeches are presented as a compass overview to be used and developed in the case-based chapters on President Barack Obama that follow.

²² <http://projectnarrative.osu.edu/>

²³ I write preliminary conclusion, because one argument presented throughout this dissertation is that narrative rhetoric can be seen as being connected to concepts such as constitutive rhetoric and public memory, and this relationship will be developed in the following chapters, rather than in this initial chapter.

Within a political context in particular, there has been a recent critique of the parallel term to narrative, that is, storytelling. Research that uses this term focuses more particularly on the political use of narratives. The recent critique is often aimed at President George W. Bush and his use of narrative rhetoric post 9/11 in his administration's justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Salmon, 2010). This critique of the political use of narratives concludes the chapter and should be seen as a transition into the following chapter on the role narratives play within presidential rhetoric.

The framework of narrative studies allows this project to consider specific elements in the rhetoric of a president more closely and how these elements form parts of the traditions surrounding presidential rhetoric. The framework will also allow for an exploration of how President Obama's use of narrative rhetoric differs in specific ways from that of his predecessors'.

A Basic Understanding of Four Elements in a Narrative

"Stories surround us... Narrative is a fundamental way that humans make sense of the world." (Bordwell, 2001, p. 59) This is how film theorist David Bordwell begins his description of film narrative in the text book *Film Art*. Bordwell presents a number of important basic elements used to describe what defines a narrative, including narrator, setting, character, and plot. These four elements are prevalent in film studies, as well as in the study of literature, where James Phelan's work with literature has already been mentioned, and will be dealt with in greater detail later on. In political rhetoric, these basic elements of a narrative have also been referenced by scholars. Political activist and lecturer Marshall Ganz, for instance, references three elements of a story: plot, character, and moral in his description of what constitutes narratives in a political context. A plot "... engages us, captures our interest, and makes us pay attention." (Ganz, 2011, p. 280) The character in a plot enables identification with the plot: "Through our empathetic identification with a protagonist, we experience the emotional content of the story." (Ganz, 2011, p. 281) And finally, the moral of the story is the message the storyteller wishes to present. While Ganz does not describe setting as a major element of a story he still acknowledges that the use of setting is what sets the three other elements into play.

In spite of these elements appearing in the understanding of what constitutes a narrative across many fields of study, it is also important to note the differences between narratives told in different media and with different intentions. As David Herman points out: "...attempting a wholesale transfer of ... all the tools developed by students of cinematic narratives, say, to research

on narratives told in contexts of face-to-face interaction or vice versa... might focus attention on what the two storytelling media have in common, at the expense of finer-grained analyses of their specific constraints and affordances.” (Herman, p. 25, 2009) While these basic elements of a narrative: plot, character, setting, and narrator can therefore also relate to the rhetoric of a political speaker, one has to consider the context within which the narratives are told.

Characters are often seen as the main entry point into a narrative for its audience. We identify with characters and their ideals, we can be repulsed by characters, or the actions of characters can be understood as cautionary tales for our own lives. For a character to be believable for an audience in a narrative, they often have to contain both good and bad sides, or serve a clear function in the plot of the narrative, to seem relevant to the audience. The character’s personal development in the shape of an ‘arc’ through the plot is often what connects the audience to the progression through the narrative. In a political speech, it is important that characters serve a clear function for the speaker incorporating them. A clear difference from more fictional content is that characters in a political speech are less ambivalent in their characteristics, due to both the time constraints of a speaker and the need for a clearer message in the political speech. A character can then be defined as a person described in the text that either serves as identification for the audience or as a symbol for the theme the speaker is trying to convey.

The use of *setting* is also a key element in establishing a believable narrative within fiction. Within a novel or film, the setting is what is presented to the audience through the text or *mise en scene* – the staging of the drama. For a speaker in a political context, the setting can be a helpful element in a reference to the context of the speech situation. The geographical setting can either be directly described by the speaker in the speech, or themes from the setting where the speech is given can be drawn upon in more indirect ways²⁴. What is unique about the setting in connection with a narrative is the setting’s ability to set the borders for the narrative. In this way the use of setting in narrative rhetoric often refers more directly to the context of the situation than the use of characters does. Setting can also be used to reflect the characters and/or the speaker presenting them, as well as to move the focus within a speech through one setting to another. Setting in this way can be seen as an aid to the plot or the character description in both descriptive and symbolic ways. The setting, then, refers to the surroundings referred to by the speaker in the

²⁴ Simply by speaking in Berlin as an American politician, for instance, a speaker evokes a series of historic connections through the setting to presidents speaking in Berlin, such as Presidents Kennedy and Reagan, which contributes to the understanding of the contemporary speaker’s speech as much as through the words alone.

text and can, in the same way as a character can, serve as identification for the audience, as well as function in a more symbolic manner to further the theme of the speech.

A *plot* is described by the narrative scholars Phelan and Rabinowitz as "... the chronological sequence of events in a narrative." (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2012, p. 57) The plot shows events as structured and unfolding, linked together. Plot, then, is the structure of a narrative, while the term progression can be described as the movement through this structure. When considering the dissertation's emphasis on speeches, this can be described as *which* narrative structures are used in the speech to establish one or more plots, and *how* the speaker moves between these structures throughout the speech to establish progression in the narrative. So when we consider the formal nature of narratives in their structure, we should also consider the progression through this structure as part of what defines a narrative, set-up and pay-off references for instance, as well as the arcs of the narrative themes and the different characters in the narratives within the speech²⁵. A plot in a book, play, or film can be paralleled in the overall structure of a political speech with a beginning, middle, and end to the text, as well as a structure that progresses throughout the speech towards a climax. Yet the intentions of a plot in a fictitious work and a plot in a speech have different goals for the audience watching. While a fictional plot can begin in the middle of a story, or attempt to fool its audience with misleading information, a political speaker needs to show more creative restraint in his approach to the plots used in his speech. Again clarity and brevity are in focus when considering the difference between a fictional and a non-fictional narrative. What *is* common for plot constructions is the need for a progression in the plot, to help facilitate the sense of a coherent structure for the audience, to move them from one event to the next. However, once this progression reaches its climax, the way to end the plot represents different needs for fictional and non-fictional content. In a classical approach to narrative in, for instance, Hollywood cinema, there is a need for a satisfying end to the story. Whether happy or sad, the audience needs closure with the plot of the narrative (Bordwell, 2001, pp. 68-70). The narrative plot in a political speech, however, is more directed toward an ongoing process that needs to be fueled further and set its sight on new goals, once the initial climactic goal has been achieved or deemed unattainable. A way to do this is to draw in the audience to the plot and describe them as the protagonists of the ongoing narrative that will continue even after the speech is done (Lucaites &

²⁵ The plot in itself can also serve a thematic purpose – the message being developed by how it is presented – for instance by serving up a moral issue through a sermon-like structure, or telling of a journey to establish a mindset of change for the audience.

Condit, 1985; Ganz, 2010). When discussing the plot of a narrative it is then the overall structure of either a single event or a line of events linked together thematically or for the purpose of clarity for the audience.

One way to establish characters, settings, and plot in a narrative is through the use of a fourth narrative element: *the narrator*. A narrator can be either omniscient or restricted (Bordwell, 2001, p. 72), which signifies either a godlike presence towards the events, or a closer position to what is going on, where the narrator may play an active role in the plot and know even less than the audience. Again an important difference to point out between fictional and non-fictional content is that in fiction a narrator can be unreliable, both by having a hidden agenda²⁶, or simply by being in an unnatural state²⁷. A fictional narrative can play with the bond of trust or ‘contract’ between narrator and audience, while this bond needs to remain intact for a political speaker in order to maintain fidelity with his audience²⁸. The narrator of a speech, then, is most often the speaker, and his role is to convey the other elements of the narrative in a truthful manner that establishes a coherent plot with believable and relevant use of both settings and characters.

These are four of the basic elements that go into a narrative, and it is possible to see them repeated in the many different fields that narrative studies are related to. Yet in spite of the elements’ commonality, they also represent some of the more contested issues within narrative studies, precisely because of the basic and often inescapable role they play in narratives. The distinction of what a narrator is, for instance, has led to a widespread debate in narrative studies on how to understand the role of the author of a text. As narrative scholars Phelan and Rabinowitz point out: “First, especially in the wake of post structuralism’s provocative proclamation of “The Death of the Author,” there is serious disagreement about whether we should be talking about authors at all.” (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2012, p. 30) Yet while it is possible to contest the authority of the author of a text, Phelan and Rabinowitz’s argument is that their rhetorical approach to narratives shows why the author cannot be completely ignored: “To the extent that you are considering narrative as a communicative process, then authors, and their communicative purposes,

²⁶ Such as the narrator revealing himself directly in the text and presenting multiple endings in the book *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969)

²⁷ Such as the dead man narrating in the film *Sunset Blvd.* (1950)

²⁸ In the case of a speaker such as President Obama, this relationship between narrator and audience becomes interesting to consider as President Obama moved from the genre of the memoir to his political speeches. In the memoir, as we shall discuss in greater detail, Obama was able to use compound characters and change the time and setting of specific events in his life to fit his overall plot and message. President Obama as a political speaker is not able to take the same liberties, so only careful selections from his memoir are used in his speeches. What is interesting, then, are the choices Obama made in regards to narration, and his view of narrating the past in the memoir.

matter: there can be no rhetoric without a rhetor.” (p. 30) Understanding narrative as part of a communicative process then posits that there is a clear author for the text being presented, which the audience can relate to as the teller of the narrative. The question of authorship is also often raised when considering the speeches given by a president, as was mentioned in the introductory chapter. The understanding of the U.S. presidency as an institution as much as the individual in office, and the presidential speeches as being given by a representative of the office as much as by an individual, suggests that the term narrator rather than author is appropriate to use when discussing the speeches of the president.

The debate on authorship and the role of a narrator illustrates the need for clear definitions of the basic elements used to describe a narrative. The above presentations of the four basic elements of a narrative will be the red thread in the following sections, where we consider how the elements have developed by scholars dealing with narrative as a term in changing research environments.

Narrative Studies: An Overview

To better understand how the basic elements of a narrative are perceived, and to gain a general understanding of the prevalent use of narrative as a term in academia we turn to the research done within narrative studies. While narratives used within presidential rhetoric can be seen as one specific topic within the larger field of narrative studies, it is still relevant to consider the major developments in the study of narratives, and how this can bring us from the basic understanding of elements such as character, setting, plot, and narrator to more specific narrative concepts used today. One consideration that is important to have in mind throughout this overview process is the relationship between “What a narrative is” vs. “how a narrative is studied” (Iversen, 2013, SINS). This distinction suggests that the difference of how narrative is understood as a term in rhetorical criticism of texts and how narrative is described in theoretical discussions is an important distinction to make, as was pointed out in the introduction with the distinction between an “emic” and an “etic” approach. For instance, in a theoretical discussion we need to consider whether we are looking at how narratives are constructed (structuralism), considering the values presented by the narrative (ideological criticism) or seeing narrative as intended communication (the rhetorical approach) (Iversen, 2013, SINS). The distinction is relevant because narrative as a term is used and

understood in many different ways both in the general public, and in academia²⁹. These distinctions in the discussion on narrative can be brought closer together; for instance, by considering how theoretical concepts of narrative can be used to describe commonly held conceptions of narrative as a term, but it is important to make the distinction nonetheless.

Narratives as Text

The conception of narrative structures and a narrative perception of the world have been in evidence in human thought since Aristotle's writings on dramatic structure. Yet if we are to consider the present state of narrative studies and the understanding of narrative as a term, a starting point could be the study of narratology, which connected narrative as a term to structuralism in the mid-20th century through the work of Gérard Genette and Roland Barthes, among others, as well as the translated work of Vladimir Propp from an earlier period. These scholars approached the term through linguistics, emphasizing the symbolism of narratives (Genette, 1980), and the repetition of certain narrative structures (Propp, 1968). Structuralism was focused on finding patterns that stuck and could establish an understanding of the rules of narrative. For Propp these rules helped determine the role of characters, events and the progression through these events (Phelan, 2006, p. 4). The marked difference between the structuralists and contemporary narrative researchers is that the structuralists sought to establish a definite set of elements in the different categories of narrative.

Genette can be said to have suggested a more complex approach to narrative than described by structuralists such as Propp (Phelan, 2006, p. 3). Yet Genette's approach to the study of narratives is

²⁹ The European Narrative Network held a conference in Kolding in 2011 which presented some of the very different approaches scholars were taking to narrative studies. Educational studies, for instance, was using narrative as a term in the study of children and their learning abilities. Educational researcher Elin Ødegaard from Bergen University presented a project focused on the cognitive communication among children in kindergarten classes. Here, Ødegaard worked with an understanding of narrative that viewed the term as: a) A way of knowing and communicating²⁹ b) A process of co-creating (between listener and teller) c) Storytelling and d) a site for cultural formative practices (Ødegaard, 2011). With a study such as Ødegaard's, we can see that even in childhood, narrative is a concept that can be comprehended *and* used through an understanding of how stories are constructed and how events must follow each other in specific fashion. This understanding is established through social interaction, and the ability to tell stories can, through this interaction, be said to have an influence on the same social interactions.

Another approach to narrative presented at the conference in Kolding was the use of narrative as a term in medical science. Narrative here often refers to the building of either life stories for individuals, or stories about their illness, which help the patients cope with their problems. Professor in Health and Medicine Sciences Lars Christer Hydén from Linköping University presented a study on Alzheimer patients, where collaborative storytelling became a moral activity for both the healthy and the sick spouse. Each person in the relationship reaffirmed their support of the relationship through storytelling. Hydén described this as "Scaffolding storytelling" (Hydén, 2011), where the healthy person created a framework for the patient by describing the broad structures of past events. Through this "scaffold" the patient was then able to connect small, personal "islands of memory" - snippets of very precise and detailed memory that were still present - into a recognizable fully formed narrative. Narrative in this way can become an intricate part of how we approach life, in old age as well as in youth.

seen as mainly seeking to enhance the considerations of the structures in a narrative, rather than moving the understanding of narrative towards a cognitive understanding. This cognitive understanding of narratives would be introduced later on within, first, the study of literary narratives, and, later, in fields not immediately associated with narratives, such as medicine and psychology.

In the latter half of the 20th century, other fields of research began to take an interest in narratives as well. Historian Hayden White, for instance, introduced the concept of story into the field of historical research in the 1970s. White believed that historians developed their research on history by organizing the studied events into what resembled a story, and in this organization historians were governed by underlying narrative structures that influenced their decisions. White's argument was that the historian chose a structure for the historic moment and used a narrative understanding as a way to connect the elements of the moment like a thread (White, 1973). In his description of how the past was turned into a story, White also focused on issues of plots and morals, yet he also emphasized the role of narratives as social centers (White, 1987). Ernest Bormann also dealt with how groups use narratives to create common, shared understandings through fantasy themes and inside jokes, describing what he defines as "rhetorical vision" in the following way: "[it] is a cohesive narrative structure shared by many people in a group or organization which makes sense of the world for them." (Herrick, 1997, p. 236)

This quality of White's understanding of narratives in historical research is relevant for this dissertation's focus on presidential rhetoric. Firstly, because the presidents themselves as speakers have a prevalent use of historic references, as we shall see in the chapter on the narrative of nation. Secondly, White's recognition of the moral aspect of narratives and their function as social centers points to both the individual use of narratives (as will be discussed in the chapter on the narrative of self), and the commonality of shared narratives, which will be discussed in the chapter on the narrative of the people.

Narrative beyond the Text

White's approach to stories and historical research exemplifies a shift from only considering narrative as textual structures to also including people's perceptions. This approach includes a subjective element of the use of narrative form, where narrative is considered part of a social practice and not only as an aesthetic form. In the 1980s, scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) were focused on the moral issues related to the use of narratives and sought to explain how

narrative could represent an identity for a person: “Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth.” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 216) In this way, ‘Man’ not only sees the world through stories, but also uses these stories to understand the commonality *between* men through the sharing of narratives that form the social centers Hayden White spoke of. This approach to narratives represents the move away from viewing narratives as primarily structural forms, associated with literature, film, theatre etc. Narrative as personal experience instead would gain increasing attention within narrative studies, as well as in rhetoric through Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm.

Within narrative studies in general, the rhetorical approach to narratives in the late 1980s and early 1990s came into its own along with a number of other humanistic approaches to narrative as a term, which is often described as the “narrative turn” (McAdams, 2001). The psychological approach to narratives was introduced by building on the view that humans established their understanding of themselves through stories, and that these stories could be raised to a mythical level for the individual, representing the grand narrative of an individual’s whole life: “Identity is a life story. A life story is a personal myth that an individual begins working on in late adolescence and young adulthood in order to provide his or her life with a purpose.” (McAdams, p. 5, 1993) This approach to narratives was also part of Monika Fludernik³⁰’s research: “We are all narrators in our daily lives, in our conversations with others, and sometimes we are even professional narrators...Narrating is therefore a widespread and often unconscious spoken language activity which can be seen to include a number of different text-types...” (Fludernik, 2009, p. 1) Fludernik’s emphasis was on a cognitive approach to narratives. Through the cognitive approach, narrative studies became focused on the way we understand and process narratives: “In addition, cognitive narratology focuses on narrative itself as a tool of understanding, that is, on how narrative contributes to human beings’ efforts to structure and make sense of their experiences.” (Phelan, 2006, p. 5)

Fludernik argued that this expanded understanding of narrative meant that rather than considering whether a narrative is a narrative or not, one should instead consider the level of “narrativity”: “The central thesis of my book *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* (1996) is therefore that narrativity should be detached from its dependence on plot and be redefined as the

³⁰ Professor in English Literature and Culture.

representation of experientiality.” (Fludernik, 2009, p. 109) Fludernik saw this concept of narrativity ”...as grounded not in the presence of a teller and a sequence of events but rather in our embodied experience of the world, what she calls experientiality.” (p. 5) Fludernik in this way focused on the human experience in a narrative, rather than the plot of the narrative. There has to be someone in the narrative through whom events can be experienced in order for the audience to perceive what is being told as a narrative.

Related to Fludernik’s developments in the understanding of narrative as a term, is David Herman’s focus on the concept of “storyworlds” in the book *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Herman, 2004). Herman’s concept is described as: “...mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where and why in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate... as they work to comprehend a narrative” “ (Phelan, 2006, p. 6) Herman’s work and his understanding of what constitutes a narrative relates to his emphasis on face-to-face narratives, another development, which moved the studies away from only focusing on traditional texts. Because of this emphasis on conversation, the elements Herman describes as basic for a narrative cannot be directly transferred to this dissertation’s focus on political speeches. Yet the goal of Herman to give attention to narratives in every-day language that risks going unnoticed is relevant in political speeches as well, which will be argued later on. Herman’s view of narratives establishing worlds of understanding for the audience (to the narratives) resembles the Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm, as we shall see later on. Herman also incorporates the psychological approach to narratives: “Herman’s contribution here is grounded in a conception of both “storytelling” and “story-receiving” as cognitive activities that converge in the process of world making. Creators of stories produce “blueprints for world construction” and consumers of stories try to follow those blueprints as they build mental models of storyworlds.” (Phelan, 2012, p. 191) This conception of a story world, into which the narrator invites the audience, not only relates to researchers in the study of narratives, but also to researchers doing work on political rhetoric directly such as George Lakoff and his emphasis on framing through central metaphors. (Lakoff, 2004) John Murphy’s argument that epideictic rhetoric establishes a ‘world’ wherein arguments can be presented to an audience in a more advantageous context (Murphy, 2003).

David Herman has one particular distinction that seems of further relevance for this dissertation: His principles of “microdesigns” and the “macrodesigns” of storyworlds, by which Herman meant the local and the global strategies of constructing and understanding such worlds.” (Phelan, 2006, p. 6) ‘Micro’ then relates to the sequence and the elements within the individual

scene, while ‘macro’ relates to the time and context of the *storyworld* (p. 6). If we are to consider how this relates to narrative rhetoric, the local level of a narrative can be described as the narratives found within a speech in sentences, paragraphs or even mere sentences and words. While a global level of a narrative can relate to narratives stretched out between different parts of a speech relating to the same event or theme within the speech, as well as across a larger number of speeches, where a sustained narrative theme is built up over time through local narratives from different speech situations.

Narrative Rhetoric as both Content and Form

With the incorporation of nonfictional content as valid artifacts for narrative studies in the 1980s and 1990s, we see the emphasis placed on the *function* of narrative, as much as on the form of narrative. This approach to narrative as a function differs from what could be described as “(Classical) Narratology” developed in the research of fiction with an emphasis on *form* in the 1960s. The fictional side of narrative studies has also developed into what with a broad term has been called “Postclassical Narratologies”, including the cognitive, feminist, unnatural, transmedial, and discursive approaches. The study of narrative rhetoric can be seen as constituting a middle ground between narrative fiction and non-fiction from the 1980s and onwards (Iversen, 2013, SINS). Another strand of narrative research which straddles fictional and non-fictional content can be seen in the work done on “fictionality” (Jacobsen et al., 2013). The term deals with narratives not as genres bound to traditional formats, but rather as a quality that can be attributed to non-fictional statements such as a political speech (Jacobsen et al., 2013, p. 7). While this approach could potentially aid the dissertation’s focus on the relationship between an idealized version of a nation and acknowledgements of the ambiguousness of reality, the concept of fictionality focuses to a great extent on that which is imagined in statements, when a speaker for instance presents a conscious fiction to the audience (Jacobsen et al., 2013, p. 153). This approach leaves out, for instance, the attention to historic references to actual events and people, as presented by the speaker, which is also of importance to the dissertation’s focus on presidential rhetoric.

In this dissertation narrative rhetoric is understood as an umbrella term in itself, which covers both narrative function and narrative forms found in the content of rhetorical discourse that have the qualities researchers have attributed to the use of narratives in rhetoric.

Narrative studies in the 1990s also began to emphasize a narrative inquiry with a more socio-political approach to the understanding of the use of narratives (Warhol, 1989). Narratives here

were seen as ways to describe ideologies of society; how literature could have an influence on society, and the influence of society on a literary text. Narrative in this way is often understood in relation to the discourse theories of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1976), and seen as a way to create dominating world views to control others through hegemonic power structures. Foucault's influence on the study of discourses and understanding of power structures in society has established the idea that there are governing descriptions of societal norms that can be controlled. These can be described as domineering narratives as well, if the focus is on descriptions or utterances that have been spoken and become predominant, at the expense of other utterances, in our understanding of reality (Raffnsøe, 2008, pp. 183-184). For Foucault, power is described as the ability to limit and suppress others in their ability to define their own world view (Raffnsøe, 2008, p. 30). A narrative can function in similar fashion, as we will see later on in scholars' description of both the political use of storytelling and with presidential rhetoric having the ability to silence certain groups of Americans for the benefit of a perceived majority.

Focusing In On Small Stories

In more recent research within narrative studies during the 2000s and 2010s, digital media (Page, 2012) has become a new field of inquiry with its emphasis on the transmedial quality of narratives (Iversen, 2014). Another recent shift in research on narratives is towards "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2007). The term *small stories* relates to fragmented narratives in every-day face-to-face conversations that allow an approach to the self of the narrator that is split in different personalities across social contexts, rather than having one core personality as described by for instance narrative psychology. Essentially, Georgakopoulou suggests a focus with "small stories" that moves away from only looking at 'big' and classical stories (such as life stories in narrative psychology): "One of the implications of this orthodoxy is that it has deterred analysts from the basic recognition that narrative, exactly like other types of discourse, is not a unified and homogenous mode, but it presents generic variability and in turn structural variability." (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 7) Instead Georgakopoulou argues that attention should also be turned towards types of narrative material that have not previously been regarded as narratives. This could include tweets on the social media Twitter and updates on other online social networks. The purpose of small stories for the storytellers is that of creating identities (Georgakopoulou, 2013). A narrative in the shape of a small story has the ability to establish this identity through reference to common narratives that are alluded to in the fragments of the conversations studied. In

conversation, intertextuality or “indexicality” more precisely is used to “...refer to processes of more or less strategically invoking and reworking histories of associative meanings, previous interactional contexts and shared resources, including previously told stories, in the course of narrative tellings.” (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 9) This relationship between the context of the present telling and previous stories told is seen in the “...shared resources that have accumulated over a period of regular contact and socialization amongst the participants involved.” (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 10) In the use of this index of references, the narrator and the audience’s backgrounds become important in order for the smaller stories to function within an acceptable context.

This understanding of narratives as interrelated for groups communicating with each other also relates to the social aspect of narratives, where the social dynamics of a groups’ use of narratives can resemble that of a nation’s use of narratives. Narratives in social groups, as described by Georgakopoulou, are used in different ways through group retellings, restructuring shared texts, references, and quotes referencing earlier told narratives. (Georgakopoulou, 2007, pp. 11-12) In the same way, a narrative in a public speech, it is argued in this dissertation, can be more than a retelling of an event, or an anecdote with a specific moral point told in conjunction. A narrative in a public speech can also resemble the references in a social group to previously known and shared narratives. A president’s speaker position even allows him the attempt to introduce new references into the national conversation, which we will also see Barack Obama do.

A narrative, then, is not only constituted by traditional fairy tales or mythological epics, but also the snippets and islands of stories that can be combined to larger macro- or meta-narratives: “A ‘life story’ should not only be understood as a 90-year-old person reminiscing by the fire. Smaller stories placed together also show the broadness of a life.” (Georgakopoulou, 2013) Alexandra Georgakopoulou argues that this is a shift away from canonical stories, as well as a move away from the static approach to life narratives that lead to one specific identity for the person living the life. This identity, established through a tying together of events in one’s life, is seen as *too* coherent by Georgakopoulou. Instead, small stories are seen as a representation of different aspects of the self to others in strategic ways. What is important to consider is that the narrator can choose to delegate parts of themselves to the audience through narratives and references – rather than only presenting a truthful whole through the background of the narrator³¹.

³¹ This is highly relevant when considering Obama’s narrative of self, since he is presenting an open “self” that can be interpreted in different ways, already in his own text of the biography. This is a valuable strategy as the first online and

As presented above, the dissertation argues that Georgakopoulou's ideas on broadening the focus of what constitutes a narrative can also be transferred to more traditional texts such as a speech by a president. The focus suggested here is on seeing the "fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world," which can be overlooked "... by an analytical lens which only looks out for fully-fledged stories." (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. VII) The idea this dissertation wants to transfer to more traditional speech texts from Georgakopoulou is the value of considering narratives as more than closed off and finished stories. Instead fragmented parts of a narrative should also be considered relevant in the formation of narratives in the minds of the audience.

Small stories are seen as "social practices" rather than "texts" (Georgakopoulou, 2007, pp. 12). This distinction is important to recognize in relation to the understanding of narratives in this dissertation. Therefore the term small stories will not be transferred directly. Rather, the attention to similar shorter versions of narratives will be focused on in the approach to the texts of the speeches by Barack Obama. In this way Georgakopoulou's work still informs the dissertation's approach to rhetorical criticism. While Georgakopoulou's engagement is in the stories that have previously not been deemed large enough to be dealt with, this dissertation seeks to use her arguments and the understanding of "small stories" to promote a similar attention to speeches given by presidents. Not only the larger, and well established narrative forms that can be found in presidential rhetoric, such as the anecdote, but also to smaller forms of stories in the shape of sentences and words. These small stories aid the presidential speaker in establishing a story world for the audience, just as much as the larger narrative structures do, because of what they are capable of establishing references to in for instance U.S. history. These forms of narrative, which function as *narrative sparks* in the speeches, should be considered *as* important as larger narratives in the speech when establishing the broader presidential themes, as well as the more personal themes of Barack Obama's narrative rhetoric.

social media president, where the identity can be parsed out for different groups, but it also opens up for a critique of the national level of character for the president, and when he gives public speeches, for instance, where he has to be understood more clearly by the population. Through his 1) thematic approach to identity fluidity, 2) his acknowledgement of subjective narration, and 3) the campaign and presidency's use of social media techniques Obama is moving away from the static approach to narrative identity for the presidency. In the past, political choices were mapped based on the background of the person and this person's life narrative – which resembles Phillip Hammack's approach to Obama in his text on Obama's life narrative. Yet with Obama, his non-static polyphonic narrative identity clashes with the highly traditional identity of the US presidency and its genre conventions of how to portray itself. Obama's contribution to presidential rhetoric, then, is the more open negotiation of identity, both for the people and for himself.

The dissertation is therefore inspired by Georgakopoulou's goal "...to put small stories firmly on the map of narrative analysis, as an ... antidote to the longstanding tradition of 'big stories' which, be they in the form of life stories or of stories of landmark events, have monopolized the inquiry into tellers' representations of past events and of themselves in the light of these events." (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 147) Yet it is not entirely the same project, since the dissertation still deals with 'big stories' in the shape of a head of state's life story and landmark events of a nation's history. Rather, it is Georgakopoulou's suggestion of an inclusion of a broader view of what can be identified as narratives that will be emphasized here. Georgakopoulou's emphasis is on conversational texts, yet it is suggested here that the intention of the use of narratives is also in a sense conversational for the president, where he is informed not only by his own agenda, but by the context of his speeches. This interaction between individual experience and collective understandings is described by Georgakopoulou as "... processes of more or less strategically invoking and reworking histories of associative meanings, previous interactional contexts and shared resources, including previously told stories, in the course of narrative tellings." (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 149) While not speaking of presidential rhetoric, this description by Georgakopoulou suggests a reason as to why presidential speakers often refer to well-known events and people, and why these references should not merely be seen as uninspired repetition of previous presidents' rhetoric.

Another researcher working on 'the frontline' of narrative studies today is Ruth Page. Her research has focused on stories in social media and how they have an influence on what we consider a narrative. In her research on the use of narratives in social media, Page sees identity as plural and fluid, in a similar way to Georgakopoulou's "small stories". Life stories should not be seen in a non-static way, but instead as specific presentations of moments in a person's past that can be changed, according to the needs of the narrator and the audience. While small stories' main purpose is to move away from "canonical" stories, this dissertation, as stated above, suggests that the understanding of small stories is important to consider even within more classical texts, such as presidential speeches. This is the case precisely because they function within an environment where the use of small stories has become even more prevalent with the introduction of social media as a method of communication alongside the traditional speech situation. These smaller messages function within the speech on their own, but can also be seen as functioning across media, both through a technical platform approach (Youtube, Twitter and Facebook responses to a live speech

for instance), but also through a structural approach to the narratives in the design of larger master plots established across speeches, where an arc is established³².

With this selected survey of the field of narrative studies, the groundwork has been laid for discussing how narrative as a term can relate to rhetorical discourse. More specifically the concepts considered help us understand how narrative can be seen as an element in presidential rhetoric, and how narratives are used by President Barack Obama. The inclusion of context into the analysis of narratives, as well as the acknowledgement of the subjective approach to the use of history are examples of how a narrative analyzed in a speech should not be seen as separate from the situation it was given in. The form a narrative can take has also changed significantly, both through the number of new fields that have taken an interest in narratives, such as psychology, and also media developments. These developments should not only reflect how we identify narratives in these new settings, but also how we understand narratives in more classical texts such as the political speech. Both the subjective context of a narrative and the new forms a narrative can take should and will inform this dissertation's understanding of Barack Obama as a narrator and speaker. Before we reach this subject, however, we should consider the previous efforts there have been in bridging the field of narrative studies with that of rhetorical studies. For this purpose, we turn to the writings of James Phelan on rhetorical narratives.

A Rhetorical Approach to Narratives

James Phelan has described narrative theory as moving "...from literary narrative to narrative tout court..." (Phelan, 2006, p. 1) Phelan's view is that literary narrative theories can be used to discuss the myriad of other kinds of narratives that have come to be described as such, but that these conceptions of narratives must be tested rigorously, before the assumption of their validity can be taken seriously (p. 2). Phelan in this way recognizes the concerns of scholars such as Peter Brooks, who worried about the proliferation of the use of narrative as a term. Yet Phelan also recognizes the potential of the narrative approach outside of literary narrative theory. The main emphasis in Phelan's own work has been on presenting a rhetorical approach to narratives, where

³² President Obama in many ways is the first president to use narratives within the Web 2.0 environment. This can be said to influence not only the perception of President Obama in this media landscape, but also in his more traditional speeches, where the new media's influence on how we perceive narratives also has an impact on how we perceive the 'old' texts such as speeches.

fictional narratives are seen as rhetorical statements, which entails a consideration of context and audience, for instance.

With this approach to narrative as a term, Phelan picks up on the research interest on the relationship between narratives and rhetoric as presented by Wayne C. Booth in *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Phelan's research can help identify the connection between narrative studies and rhetoric, where Phelan's approach is from the narrative studies' side of the 'bridge' towards rhetoric. This means that instead of narrative rhetoric it is *rhetorical narratives* Phelan focuses on. Phelan, then, is still focused on a literary criticism in his approach to fictional narratives. The focus for this dissertation is instead on narrative rhetoric as seen in the non-fictional content of presidential rhetoric, and in particular Barack Obama's memoir and his speeches.

In Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz's book *Narrative Theory Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (2012)³³, they describe the core elements of narrative studies as "...authors, narrators, and narration; plot, time, and progression; space, setting, and perspective; character; reception and the reader; and issues of value..." (Phelan, 2012, p. ix) If one should point to the elements of this list that we have also dealt with, it is the narrator himself, the plot or structure of the narrative, the settings used, and the characters within the narrative itself.

Understanding narratives as rhetorical texts means for Phelan and Rabinowitz to see the term narrative as "... primarily a rhetorical act rather than as an object." (p. 3) Here Phelan and Rabinowitz move away from understanding narrative as a text. Instead, Phelan and Rabinowitz emphasize that there is a purpose behind the text. When similarly considering a speech as an act rather than as a text, the context of the setting and the audience can alter the understanding of the content significantly. For instance, local or national idioms in the language must also be considered. Phelan and Rabinowitz build on their definition of narrative as an act by focusing on narrative as not only the link between events, but also the event itself: "Narrative is often treated as a representation of a linked sequence of events, but we subsume that traditional viewpoint under a broader conception of narrative as itself an event..." (p. 3) Although Phelan and Rabinowitz suggest moving beyond the coherence between events as the emphasis of narrative form, they still put an emphasis on the progression of narrative as an important aspect of a rhetorical narrative, regarding it "... as the key means by which an author achieves his or her purposes." (p. 6) In this sense it is not only the context of the act that matters. The internal structure of a narrative still

³³ https://ohiostatepress.org/index.htm?books/book_pages/herman_narrative.html

remains a key element in understanding a narrative, because it is the linking together of events and characters that shape the purpose and progression of the narrative³⁴.

Three Components of the Rhetorical Approach to Narratives

With the incorporation of the context of a rhetorical narrative's presentation, Phelan and Rabinowitz focus both on the narrator's intention with the narrative, as well as the responses of the audience. They divide both the narrator's intention and the audience response into three broad components: "mimetic, thematic, and synthetic." (p. 7)

The mimetic component is the narrator's intention of making the characters come to life on their own terms, and thereby "... involve readers' interests in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as like our own..." (p. 7) The mimetic component both relates to Walter Fisher's theory of the narrative paradigm, as well as to other theorists' idea of enabling people's identification with a narrative through the connection between the characters and the audience's own experiences in a sense of consubstantiality (Burke, 1950).

The second component of the narrator's intention and the response of the audience is the thematic component. With this component the narrator attaches the character to the larger idea of the narrative, to enable the narrative to "...involve readers' interests in the ideational function of the characters and in the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues being addressed by the narrative." (p. 7) The thematic component relates to what this dissertation defines as *narrative themes*: the content of narrative rhetoric that presents the audience with the message, or idea as Phelan describes it, of the rhetorical act. A political speech will often focus on this component in the narratives presented to move the audience from a level of identification towards action on an issue.

The third component is the synthetic component: the structure or form of a narrative. This component is focused on the telling and the structuring itself of the narrative by the narrator and for the audience. This comes in the shape of the craft of writing and how the narrator uses a character structurally for the sake of the plot (p. 7). Earlier in this dissertation it was suggested that the use of narratives in political rhetoric was usually focused more on truthful than artificial characters and plots, a narrator such as Barack Obama, for instance, can be said to point out the

³⁴ We can for instance use this to understand the importance of what the writers of biographies focus on from Obama's memoir, or what Obama himself focuses on – where he finds a story worth telling in his own life, and when he considers it appropriate to stop.

actual act of storytelling itself in his writings. Thereby he reveals the synthetic component of his narration. There is a purpose with this revelation for Barack Obama, as we shall see, particularly with the narrative of self, as will be described in the chapter dealing with this narrative theme.

What is interesting to draw from these three components of both narrator intention and audience responses is that both narrator and audience are capable of focusing on different levels of a narrative within ‘the act’, and that narratives can solicit all three responses³⁵. The audience can both appreciate the recognizable and lifelike nature of the characters in the narrative; the audience can appreciate the thematic symbolism the characters represent for the narrative; and the audience can appreciate the artistic artifice of the constructed narrative as well. For the narrator, the components also show different levels in the narrator’s purpose of bringing in a character in a narrative, both structurally and thematically, either to create empathy (mimetic), an understanding of a greater issue (thematic), or for the enjoyment of the narrative itself (synthetic)³⁶.

A Narrative Understanding of Rhetoric

The need for a plot to understand both life and stories told about life is something humans have dealt with since the Greeks theorized on ways to understand the emotions and plots conveyed in the plays at the amphitheaters. In his book on the history and theory of rhetoric, James Herrick states that “The connection between rhetoric and story is an ancient one.” (Herrick, 1997, p. 229) In James Jasinski’s *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, narrative as a term is also shown as being significant for a number of concepts in rhetorical research. While it is possible to begin far earlier with a discussion of narrative as a term within rhetorical theory³⁷, the discussion in the 1980s that followed Walter Fisher’s introduction of the narrative paradigm is a relevant place to establish a bridge between narrative and rhetoric from the other ‘side’ of Phelan and Rabinowitz’s approach. With this dissertation’s focus on presidential rhetoric, the focus on Fisher as a starting point is appropriate, because of the parallel developments within both the study of presidential rhetoric and the practice of it by the concurrent administration. For instance, the suggestion of a ‘rhetorical

³⁵ For Barack Obama the primary intention as a narrator is to create a thematic response from the audience. He wants to validate this thematic response through a mimetic strategy of a memoir, while retaining hints of the synthetic, when he considers, and in this way suggests the reader do the same, the approaches to the act of recounting the past.

³⁶ The synthetic component is the one used as little as possible in a political speech, since it refers to an artificial and aesthetic appreciation, which is rarely the goal of a speaker whose main purpose with narrative elements is to create a more personal approach to his message.

³⁷ In an article in *Rhetorica Scandinavica* number 63, Stefan Iversen, for instance, described ideas on narrative from both Aristotle and Quintilian.

presidency' by Jeffrey K. Tulis in his book *The Rhetorical Presidency* from 1988³⁸, but also because researchers still use President Ronald Reagan as a case study for the use of narratives in rhetoric (Iversen, 2013).

Although Fisher's narrative paradigm has not gained the outspoken centrality to subsequent approaches to narratives in rhetoric, as Fisher intended with his project, the paradigm itself and the counterarguments against it, then and now, are still relevant to consider, since the limitations proposed to it can aid the dissertation's goal of clarifying the use of narrative as a term in presidential rhetoric.

The Narrative Paradigm

Fisher's intention with the article "Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument" (1984) was to describe not only a narrative approach to rhetoric as used by speakers to appeal to their audience, but also to create a different approach to understanding how the audience of a narrative perceived their own lives: "Regardless of the form they may assume, recounting and accounting are stories we tell ourselves and each other in order to establish a meaningful life-world. The Character of narrator(s), the conflicts, the resolutions and style will vary, but each mode of recounting and accounting is but a way of relating "a truth" about the human condition." (Fisher 1984, p. 6) Fisher, as other researchers presented in this dissertation, wished to bridge the gap between narrative understood as fiction and narrative as used by people in general in their conceptualization of the world around them. Fisher sought to move narrative as a term from representing a purely aesthetic form towards the substance of which people constructed their own lives: "From the narrative view, each of these concepts translates into dramatic stories constituting the fabric of social reality of those who compose them. They are, thus, "rhetorical fictions", constructions of fact and faith having persuasive force, rather than fantasies." (Fisher, 1984, p. 7) In this way people are seen as both storytellers and story interpreters, where they see life experiences as ongoing narratives that contain the basic elements of narrative such as characters, settings, and plot.

For Fisher, introducing the narrative paradigm represented a conceptualization of something fundamental in people's lives: the goal of living a 'good life'. Because of this goal, people would judge the stories they heard from others morally, finding some stories more just than

³⁸ The term was developed throughout the 1980s in a series of articles with other scholars.

others: "We learn these truths by dwelling in the characters in the story, by observing the outcomes of the several conflicts that arise throughout it, by seeing the unity of characters and their actions, and by comparing the truths with the truths we know to be true in our own lives. In other words, the story exhibits narrative probability and fidelity across time and culture." (p. 17) The quotation contains Fisher's attempt to operationalize the narrative paradigm through a test of a narrative's rationality with the terms *narrative probability* and *narrative fidelity*. Narrative probability relates to the internal logic of a narrative in structure and in the believability of a character's actions, for instance. Whether a narrative in this view is seen as coherent then depends to a large degree on the reliability of the character in the narrative and the actions performed. Narrative fidelity is determined by the world view of the audience, whether or not the narrative rings true in the light of their own life experiences. If the story told matches the beliefs and experience of the audience, there is a better chance of it being accepted. A religious audience for instance will be more likely to accept a story including a description of an act of divine intervention.

Fisher described the appeal of narratives for the individual, through the possibility it allowed the individual to understand the communities the person belonged to, which relates to White's and Bormann's emphasis on the communal aspects of narratives. Fisher, however, also regards narrative as appealing in the interpretation by others of individual actions. "In theme, if not in every detail, narrative, then, is meaningful for persons in particular and in general across communities as well as cultures, across time and place. Narratives enable us to understand the actions of others "because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 197). " (Fisher, 1984 p. 8) This description of a narrative also feeds into the other essential appeal of a narrative for Fisher: that the understanding of a narrative is inherent in every individual person from birth. According to Fisher, this is in opposition to the concept of rationality as the concept had been understood up to the point of Fisher's writing. "As such, rationality was something to be learned, depended on deliberation, and required a high degree of self-consciousness. Narrative rationality does not make these demands. It is a capacity we all share." (p. 9) Fisher's argument was that narrative rationality could serve as a democratization of public debate, and in this way provide an alternative to technical reasoning and argumentation. Essentially, Fisher wished to place ordinary people on the same level with technical experts in public discourse. Rather than delegating power to expert knowledge, his argument was that common sense judgments of stories told would allow the public to participate more equally in the public debate. The world should instead be seen as consisting of stories that people choose from

based on their values and beliefs. This democratizing project could be achieved by regarding deliberation through the narrative paradigm. However Fisher also maintained that certain stories were more likely to be accepted by the public than others through a moral approach to public discourse: "Obviously, as I will note later, some stories are better than others, more coherent, more "true" to the way people and the world are in fact and in value." (p. 10) For Fisher understanding argumentation through the narrative paradigm activates the public more in a debate, because it removes the elevated position of the expert and changes him/her into a storyteller to be judged more easily by the public. The public is able to make this judgment because the ability to understand a story is something people are born with, rather than attaining it through scholarly training, according to Fisher's interpretation of MacIntyre's description of humans as storytellers. Simply put, it is easier to relate to a good story than attempt to understand the intricacies of a technical argument. Yet as can be seen in the writing of George Lakoff on framing³⁹, the notion that a story is understood in the same way by all audiences may be an assumption that cannot be made.

Contemporary Critique of the Narrative Paradigm

The contemporary reactions to Fisher's article were most likely not what Fisher expected, although he did invite revisions of his theory in the original article. Scholars such as Robert Rowland, John Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit, however, questioned the very premise of the

³⁹ Lakoff's well-known example of the different views of a word such as 'family' in American politics, for instance, shows that what might be seen as a shared concept can be interpreted very differently. Lakoff is an example of a researcher working with how language influences people's political views, not only through arguments, but also through images or metaphors as he describes it in *Metaphors we live by* (2003) and other books such as *Don't Think of an Elephant!* (2004). His focus is on metaphors as central framing devices for people in their lives. Lakoff's takes a political approach with a description of the family metaphor in the American spectrum of politics. A strict father and a nurturing mother are used as metaphors representing the two major parties. These central metaphors inform the parties' overall politics and their vision on the relationship the government has with their citizens. Conservatives are described as adhering to the "strict father model" with an emphasis on discipline to create strong citizens in the mold of the strong father, so that the citizens at some point can stand on their own and fend for themselves. This translates into more direct policies of seeking to keep government out of business and leaving responsibility for success or failure entirely on the shoulders of the individual. For Lakoff, the contrast to this can be found in the liberal view of the family metaphor based around the "nurturing parent model". In this view, responsibility for the citizen is shared between mother and father who take a more active role in helping the citizen navigate through challenges of life (Lakoff, 2004).

As may be apparent, Lakoff is involved more directly in the political side of his research than is perhaps customary for scholarly research. His later work has often described an imbalance between the two political sides in U.S. politics, where conservatives are described as having been much more effective in utilizing a language of metaphors. Liberals have simply not been as aware of their guiding metaphors is Lakoff's argument. The consequence of this has, according to Lakoff, been that the frame for the political debates since Ronald Reagan's presidency has been decided by conservatives rather than liberals (Lakoff, 2004). Image established through language in this way plays an important role in political debate, much in the same way as a narrative can suggest certain ways to frame issues, through the structuring process the narratives offer the speaker on the topics being related to the audience.

paradigm, rather than test the possibilities of its operationalization. In the following, their critique of the paradigm will be used to move the discussion of the use of narratives within rhetorical discourse forward for this dissertation.

Robert Rowland described his own understanding of narrative in the article “Narrative: Mode of discourse or paradigm?” (1987) as follows: “Narrative is important because people love stories. And they love stories because of plot, character development, and aesthetic quality of the language in stories that make them more interesting than discursive argument.” (Rowland, 1987, p. 266) This approach to narratives distances the term from Fisher’s broad approach and places it in the realm of fiction again, with an emphasis on aesthetics rather than a mimetic or thematic approach. Yet in other articles Rowland does not dismiss the use of narratives entirely when discussing political rhetoric (Rowland, 2007; 2011). However, Rowland disagreed with Fisher in a fundamental way on what a narrative *is*. Rowland describes Fisher’s project as finding a new theory for argumentation and “an alternative conception of rationality ... The ultimate aim of the narrative paradigm is to provide an alternative to technical reason.” (Rowland, 1987, p. 264) Rowland critiqued Fisher’s theory through three limits: 1) The definition of narrative was seen as too broad, 2) Narrative rationality could not be seen to have an independent standard, and finally 3) the role for the expert as storyteller in society was not valid according to Rowland (p. 264).

When is a Rhetorical Text a Narrative?

With the first limit Rowland described the problem of the narrative paradigm clearly: “The problem here is that narrative has been defined so broadly that the term loses much of its explanatory power.” (p. 265) While we have seen this argument presented later by scholars such as Peter Brooks, Rowland focuses more particularly on the relationship between what constitutes a narrative and what constitutes an argument, and the difference between the two. The difference according to Rowland was that an argument relies on an evaluation where a story relies on creating interest and identification for the listener (p. 266). Rowland therefore argued that a narrative was in the need of a plot and character to function properly as a narrative (p. 267). These elements were what attracted audiences to a story and enabled their identification with it. If we are to exemplify Rowland’s view, then the words spoken by President Franklin Roosevelt during the Depression depicting the hard everyday life of an anonymous family would not be a narrative, because the thought up example did not contain a created plot, or detailed characters. In contrast, John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) would be considered a narrative with its plot and

clearly defined characters. Yet that particular novel I would argue can also be said to contain themes relating to issues beyond aesthetic pleasure for the reader. Rowland's distinctions seem too restrictive then.

Yet when considering modern-day U.S. politics, it seems a valid point that, for instance, the discussion in its entirety on the health care reform in U.S. politics during President Obama's first administration period was not a narrative (although the media has described it in this way). But when politicians discussed what the health care reform could do for Americans, what part it could play in shaping America's future, and how it related to the promise and idea of America, it was brought into a narrative structure with specific themes and different plots that were relatable to the audience as well as anonymous characters that the audience could still relate to.⁴⁰ In this sense, politicians do use narratives in their rhetoric, but in a way that differs from Rowland's view of narrative, since plot and character in these examples are not inherently fictional. This approach to narratives in rhetoric would instead be described as recounting or description by Rowland, rather than part of narrative rhetoric. Rowland then, in the view of this dissertation, was too restrictive in his approach to narrative as a term, when he stated that for a story to contain an argument, one would basically have to speak of a literary work.

Instead, it is important to consider what *elements* an audience looks for in a fictional narrative, and whether or not these are present when listening to a speaker presenting a text on factual events: e.g., a person they can relate to, the historic or geographical context of the speech, or descriptions of events that make the audience able to identify with the overall theme of the speech.

The second limit Rowland presented to the narrative paradigm was the question of how a narrative could be measured as being effective according to the narrative paradigm. Fisher's focus on moral absolutes that humans hold in common and are able to examine stories by does seem as a challenge to operationalize, and Fisher's outright dismissal of, for example, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as a poor story also overlooks why so many people found it an appealing and a believable narrative at the time it was told. And how could people such as contemporaries Winston Churchill and Mahatma Gandhi (whose political agendas were in stark contrast to each other) both have morally sound narratives, as Fisher suggests? As Rowland describes it, "there is no doubt that

⁴⁰ These statements drew on elements of narrative, such as character, setting, and plot yet their intention was not just to create aesthetic pleasure or identification, but to make a political point. For instance, President Obama's anecdote from the 2008 campaign about the young woman Ashley, who kept on eating mustard and relish sandwiches as a girl to help her sick mother deal with expensive medical bills, or Sarah Palin's description of death panels as part of 'Obamacare' in contrast.

sometimes stories are consistent, hang together, and appear to be true to life, but are also false.” (Rowland, 1987, p.270) Here we approach something central to the use of narratives in rhetoric, as well as the challenge of narrative seen as a term. The central point is that “Fisher assumes that a certain set of idealistic, traditional liberal values are true.” (p. 271) Instead Rowland suggests one must admit that the story being told is one among many competing stories being told. A narrative does not present an undisputed and shared truth, but a worldview, which through identification, or narrative fidelity and narrative probability, to still use Fisher’s terms, can appeal to certain groups of people. But very rarely can a narrative containing any specificity appeal to all groups of people. ‘Truth’ in a moral sense cannot be a measure of whether a narrative is good or not, since what a person relates moral truth to in his or her world view is most often individual in character, rather than universal. Add to this the subjectivity in the narrating process itself, where both speaker and listener edit the text to different results. This consideration should also be applied to the method of rhetorical criticism. As rhetoricians studying narrative rhetoric, what we are studying is the *construction* rather than the level of truthfulness to the tale. Truth is a means to a better story, yet it is not the only measure to tell whether a story is good or bad.

The final limit to the narrative paradigm was Fisher’s suggestion of seeing the technical expert change his role to that of a storyteller that counsels rather than an expert that ‘dictates’ what is true (pp. 271-2). Rowland sees little difference between the role of counselor and expert. The expert simply has a stronger argument, often due to his or her position and knowledge: “...narrative modes of argument are not necessarily democratic. There is nothing inherent in storytelling that guarantees that the elites will not control a society.” (p. 272) Once again this furthers the discussion on a central dilemma of the use of narratives in rhetorical discourse. Since narratives can be used by people in power to establish certain world views, the use of narratives should not be seen as a purely benevolent communication strategy. Narratives can be used to distort as much as to clarify issues, as we shall see in a later discussion of political storytelling⁴¹.

What then counts as a narrative according to Rowland? The presences of plot, character, and emotional value that can help teach the listener something about the basic conditions of life. Rowland did not contend with the *importance* of narratives in his critique of the narrative paradigm, acknowledging that many fields were utilizing narrative as a term (p. 265). This can also

⁴¹ I would also suggest significant changes have occurred for the role of the expert in society since Rowland and Fisher’s discussion in the 1980s. Today the role of the expert has become both less elevated and more flawed in the media picture. Facts are by the practitioners seen as a tool at the same level as narrative – they have different functions in a speech, but can be bent towards the speakers’ will.

be seen in his own article on presidents Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama (Rowland, 2007), where he uses narrative as a term to discuss the president's and the candidate's rhetoric. Rather it was narrative as a paradigm for public debate that troubled Rowland. Rowland suggested that one should talk of narrative as a mode of discourse instead of a paradigm. Considering Rowland's limits to the paradigm, one could state that his clarification of the relationship between rhetoric and narrative as a term has merit. Yet there are elements in the speeches of, for instance, Barack Obama that can be said to be narratives in spite of Rowland's limits here. 'Everything' in political discourse is not a narrative, but even the elements of political rhetoric not directly emphasizing character, settings, or events, can contribute to a larger narrative arc of a politician, which Rowland's understanding of narratives in rhetorical texts does not account for.

A Functional Use of Narrative as a Term and the Open End in Political Narratives

In their article "Re-constructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective" (1985), John Lucaites and Celeste Condit supported the democratizing goal of Fisher's narrative paradigm and his focus on "homo narrans" (Lucaites & Condit, 1985, p. 103), the understanding of human beings as born story-tellers and story-listeners. But their hesitation was similar to Rowland's, with a need to differentiate between narrative forms (genres), instead of adopting the broad perspective of a paradigm. Their solution to this was through an emphasis on 'action,' or 'function' of narratives (p. 104). Through these functions, different genres could be acknowledged. This differentiation was what they saw lacking in the narrative paradigm. Lucaites and Condit chose to focus on the function of narrative through three modes of discourse: poetic, dialectic and rhetoric. Each of these could be said to have a specific function.

The poetic was focused on creating a plot that entertained. What helped a listener judge such a narrative was the coherence or "internal consistency" (p. 92) of the narrative: "its appeal is ultimately a direct function of the formal and conventionalized structure of its text." (p. 93) This relates to the synthetic component of Phelan's description of a narrator's intention with a narrative, where the audience is able to appreciate a story told for its aesthetic qualities.

The second mode of discourse for Lucaites and Condit was that of the dialectical function. Here the emphasis was on telling a truth, for instance in the shape of real life stories that rang true. The content was what mattered rather than form, and in this way relates both to the thematic and the mimetic components of Phelan's rhetorical narratives.

The third mode of discourse for Lucaites and Condit was the rhetorical mode of discourse where the emphasis was on the situation. The point for Lucaites and Condit was that rhetoric combined the two previous forms in a third form that focused both on form and content, where the function of the narrative was essential. If we place the umbrella term of narrative rhetoric in relation to the rhetorical mode of discourse for Lucaites and Condit, narrative when considered in a rhetorical situation signifies a story that audiences are asked to consider in connection with an argument, rather than as an argument itself (p. 94). The functional perspective of the narrative in the instance of a political speech is the narrative's appeal to the political consciousness of the audience, through an involvement of the audience in the narrative.

Lucaites and Condit's article is relevant to this dissertation's approach to narrative rhetoric in their argument of narrative rhetoric consisting as a combination of form and content, as well as their focus on 'function' and thereby the activation of the audience (p. 100). This focus is relevant when discussing the rhetorical discourse of political candidates in the midst of campaigns that seek to get voters to the voting booth, or when analyzing a president's speech to Congress or the American people. The difference between poetics and rhetoric is this activation of the audience in the narrative. Where the audience according to Lucaites and Condit merely listen to a poetic story, they take an active decision to believe an argument placed within narrative rhetoric.

In the speech that activates its audience, it becomes the audience that must resolve the conflict presented in a narrative within the speech. In their article, Lucaites and Condit use Martin Luther King as an example to show how a speech encourages the audience to act. What separates the 'plot' of MLK's *I Have a Dream* speech (1963) from a poetic plot was that the speech did not contain a resolution as such for the audience. In narrative rhetoric the resolution is found outside of the narration (p. 101). Traditional story models most often show a clear resolution for the audience, as has been discussed earlier, while a narrative in political rhetoric is ongoing as far as the politician is concerned. The end or resolution to a politician's narrative is therefore often determined not by the politician but by an audience, such as Congress, the media, or the voters. This open end also supports the intention of focusing on smaller narrative forms in the presidential speeches, inspired by Georgakopoulou's work, since these sparks or fragments of narratives also engage the audience, both by relating to the need for a resolution found by the audience itself as described by Lucaites and Condit, and by contributing to a shared sense of referential knowledge, activating the audience's understanding of the communal definition as described by Condit.

Developing the Narrative Paradigm

It is interesting to point out, especially in connection with Lucaites and Condit's approach to the understanding of narrative as a term, with their inclusion of form and content in rhetorical discourse, that the discussion on the narrative paradigm took place during the 1980s. This time period also signified a shift in practices in American politics, where the media style of campaigns and political communication was changing, and campaign communication was being revamped and began to focus as much on form as on content⁴² (Jamieson, 1996). Perhaps this development in political communication needed to become routine in campaign cycles (as well as narrative as a term in general in the social sciences), before a developed rather than mainly critical approach to Fisher's narrative paradigm was attempted in academic writing, so that 'poetic discourse' could find a more clear place within narrative rhetoric.

As Stefan Iversen points out in his article "Narrativ Retorik" in *Rhetorica Scandinavica* (2013), the discussion on the narrative paradigm did not come to a conclusive end in the 1980s. Rather it resulted in a stalemate of sorts between Fisher and Rowland in particular. In 2009, however, Communication Studies Scholar Kevin McClure entitled an article "Resurrecting the Narrative Paradigm: Identification and the Case of Young Earth Creationism" to underscore the buried position the theory of the paradigm had gained over the years, as well as his goal with the article of reintroducing the narrative paradigm into a theoretical discussion of what a narrative could consist of in rhetoric. Within McClure's text we find an emphasis on potential solutions to the problems of the narrative paradigm, rather than an emphasis on the faults of the paradigm. In this way McClure's suggestions help to fine tune the approach to narrative rhetoric in a contemporary setting.

McClure's main objective was to refocus Fisher's theory of the narrative paradigm towards Kenneth Burke's concept of "identification", rather than deliberation, and use this focus as a way to explain how: 1) a new narrative is brought into existence; 2) how an old narrative can be revised yet still appear truthful; and 3) how an incoherent narrative can still achieve a level of narrative probability (McClure, 2009, p. 189). This approach also allows for a balanced position between the earlier critics of the paradigm and Fisher since it presents a way past Fisher's moral approach to narrative truth. The emphasis on Burke's term of 'identification' translates for McClure into a term described as "narrative identification" (p. 201). This is intended to loosen Fishers perspective on the

⁴² For an example of this see Ronald Reagan's *Its morning again in America* video from the RNC 1984: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY>

moral hierarchy and explain why new stories can supplant older ones and why well-known stories can be changed over time to suit the context of new situations. Narrative identification as a term is therefore useful to show how a person approaches a story that he or she may consider worth spending time supporting. McClure's adaption of the narrative paradigm with an emphasis on identification, rather than fidelity and probability, also allows for the recognition of multivalent narratives⁴³. Multivalent narratives should be understood as stories containing more than one meaning or even one truth. What is interesting, then, is not only whether Barack Obama's narrative is truthful, but rather how and with what he constructs the narrative.

What is lacking in McClure's approach is a clearer discussion of how to consider changes over time within a narrative, and why these changes are accepted or rejected by the audience. In this connection, this dissertation suggests that *narrative longevity* becomes an important term to consider as an updated version of Fisher's sub-concept of "narrative coherence", which was described as part of narrative fidelity. While narrative identification describes what can attract an audience to a new narrative in the first place, narrative longevity describes what can maintain the narrative elements needed to sustain identification with the narrative over time, as well as incorporate necessary changes due to contextual challenges.

Narrative as a Term in Rhetorical Criticism

While McClure's approach to the narrative paradigm helps update the theory to the more fluid state of communities and institutions in today's political climate, the approach still lacks an appropriate method to use narrative as a term in rhetorical criticism. An article that seeks to operationalize the use of narrative as a term in rhetorical discourse more clearly is Stefan Iversen's article "Narrative Rhetoric"⁴⁴ (2013). Iversen builds a bridge between the broad reaching narrative paradigm of Fisher and the restrictive distinctions, but usable approach, of Lucaites & Condit. Iversen does so by presenting three approaches to the use of narrative as a term in rhetorical criticism, and exemplifies these approaches through a speech by President Ronald Reagan.

Iversen focuses on narrative in connection with Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as a question of structure where the primary concern is that of coherence. Iversen places coherence

⁴³ "Multivalent narratives" is a term McClure finds in an article by Scott Stroud entitled "Multivalent Narratives: Extending the Narrative Paradigm with Insights from Ancient Indian Philosophical Texts" (2002). Incoherent narratives are also worthy of identification, according to Stroud, since narratives deal with not just who we are, but what we *ought* to be.

⁴⁴ The original Danish version of this title is "Narrativ Retorik". The concepts and quotations presented from the article here have been translated from Danish into English.

above Fisher's two terms of narrative probability and narrative fidelity (p. 76), rather than as part of probability as Fisher did originally. This approach supports this dissertation's emphasis on the longevity aspect of narratives as well, since coherence is essential to maintaining narrative longevity. Fisher, according to Iversen, moves narrative from a function to a basis for all human decision making, while Lucaites and Condit hold the opposite view of narrative, since the term is limited within three categories or discourses. Iversen presents a description of what the two approaches lack: "Fisher has understood the epistemological aspect of the narrative, but not the specific rhetorical forms and functions, while conversely Lucaites and Condit have grasped the specific rhetorical forms and functions, but have no means to talk about the narrative as an opinion maker and value identification." (p.77) Fisher's theory, then, can be used to suggest that narratives do have the potential to create a certain view or values that can have an impact on people's choices. Iversen suggests that Fisher's theory, in spite of its faults, actually contains more parameters to describe a narrative than the negation of Lucaites and Condit and their separation of narratives into different discourses.

But firstly Iversen discusses in more detail what he sees as three types of narratives: The first type of narrative in rhetorical discourse is the *description* of an event: Even with this straight forward approach to telling a story by recounting 'what has happened' there are choices to make for the narrator on what to focus on, which establishes the editing process of a narrative. This is a clear distinction from Rowland's approach to what constitutes a narrative, where Rowland separated recounting from narration. The second type of narrative for Iversen is the use of an *example*, which helps to create parallels between the present and similar situations that can be drawn upon to make a point. The example often focuses on "individuals as stories" (p. 83); they come close to the anecdotal form, and are more driven by a character than a plot, as the description narrative type can be said to be. The third type of narrative is that of a *master plot*, which essentially sets the frame or context for the other narratives to be established within. The master plot is formed by basic myths of a nation. An example of this kind of narrative is the concept of pilgrims in the United States. Iversen himself suggests that this third type is a bit more tricky to identify than the other two "...since it often only suggests another story that already exists outside of the text, more specifically in the culture which the specific rhetorical discourse unfolds within." (p. 83)

Iversen's goal with the article on narrative rhetoric and the three approaches he presents is to make narrative an operational term in connection with rhetorical texts, in rhetorical criticism. While it would be relevant to apply the narrative approaches of Iversen directly to the

speeches of President Barack Obama, there are some distinctions to be made between Iversen's project and the intentions of this dissertation.

Iversen focuses on narrative form and structure itself. Compared to that focus, this dissertation seeks to include a thematic aspect as well in an effort to combine the form and content of narrative rhetoric. The approaches to narrative rhetoric and concepts proposed in this chapter are thematically founded, as well as structural, in order to consider the different levels of narrator intention and audience reception described by Phelan. The concepts of these thematic approaches are presented through three presidential narrative themes: *narrative of self*, *narrative of people*, and *narrative of nation*. In their titles and meaning, the narrative themes are focused on the epideictic aspect of presidential rhetoric in particular, rather than encompassing all rhetorical narratives as Iversen's three approaches deal with. For instance, the analysis of the way we convey stories to each other in everyday conversation may not benefit as much from these particular narrative themes, as much as the study of a political candidate trying to establish identification with a large constituency. Connected to these presidential narrative themes are the more personal narrative themes of a particular candidate, which can be revealed through close reading of, for instance, Barack Obama's rhetoric.

Another distinction to make is the detailed approach that this dissertation intends to give to the narrative forms found in the texts analyzed. In the attempt to incorporate the theory of "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2007) in the description of narratives in texts that would normally be described as too grand for "small stories", smaller units of narratives, *narrative sparks*, will also be considered as being relevant for the study of a political speaker's use of narrative rhetoric. These narrative sparks are the smallest level of narrative form, and can consist of a single sentence or word. Yet their function should be seen as narratives that inspire connections to larger narratives such as the meta-plots of Iversen, and thereby contribute to the presidential narrative themes at an equal level with an anecdote for instance. Narratives at both the local and global levels (Herman, 2004) will then be identified to analyze the use of narratives in the speeches and writing of Barack Obama. The understanding of narrative as a term in this dissertation can be described as a combination of the focus on form by Iversen and the emphasis on identification by McClure. This combination is sought achieved through the thematic approach to narratives. This kind of approach is inspired by both Phelan's theories as well as Lucaites and Condit's description of what constitutes a narrative.

In spite of these distinctions, Iversen's interest in a limitation of narrative as a term and his methodical approach (p. 74) is highly useful. The intention of this dissertation is similar to Iversen's article, in the sense that the dissertation suggests both a clarification of narrative as a term as well as an attempt at operationalizing a number of concepts under the umbrella term of narrative rhetoric. While the concepts will be applied to presidential rhetoric here, similarly focused approaches to other genres or discourses dealing with narrative, such as the ones mentioned in the opening chapter of this dissertation, can also benefit from the overall discussion on narrative as a term. Research done by others on these subjects may enable a more nuanced approach to the understanding of narrative as a term as Phelan emphasized it (Phelan, 2006, p. 2).

Narrative Rhetoric as Understood in this Dissertation: Narrative Themes and Structures

The intention of the above discussions have been to clarify narrative as a term: firstly, through a discussion of what developments there have been in the field of narrative studies in relation to the use of narrative as a term; secondly, what the relationship has been between the understanding of narrative as a term and the study of rhetorical discourse; and thirdly, how narratives can be used as a concept in rhetorical criticism of political texts. As a compass for the case studies of the dissertation, the following three narrative themes and three narrative structures are presented as central to the consideration of what role narratives play within presidential rhetoric. The themes suggested focus on a narrative of the candidate, combined with a narrative of the people and nation. The concept of a *theme* here is understood as the content of the narrative that "... involves readers' interests in the ideational function of the characters and in the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues being addressed by the narrative." (Phelan, 2012, p. 7) A narrative theme then can pose both answers and questions to shared interests of the narrator and the audience, what is essential is that both are posed through the plot and characters presented in the narrative.

The distinction between the three themes is in part inspired by earlier writings on presidential rhetoric and narratives (Lewis, 1987), as well as more contemporary suggestions of lecturer Marshall Ganz on the use of story in a campaign setting⁴⁵. Marshall Ganz is a former campaign organizer himself and his three levels of story: 1) 'the story of you', 2) 'the story of us',

⁴⁵ Walter Fisher has also presented similar concepts for the analysis of President Ronald Reagan's use of narratives.

3) ‘the story of now’ (Ganz, 2011) focus on a clear activation of the campaign volunteers and the electorate, compared to the approach of this dissertation and other rhetorical scholars who focus more on rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric.

For Ganz, narration is about mobilizing the public politically: “Narrative is the discursive means we use to access values that equip us with the courage to make choices under conditions of uncertainty, to exercise agency. A story is constructed of a plot, character, and moral.” (Ganz, 2011, p. 274) The character presented in the narrative allows for empathy between the narrative told and the audience, where “storytelling is the discursive form through which we translate our values into the motivation to act.” (Ganz, 2011, p. 280) Turning this view of storytelling towards social action or mobilization of the public, Ganz argues that “Leadership, especially leadership on behalf of social change, often requires telling a new public story, or adapting an old one: a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now.” (Ganz, 2011, p. 282)

The ‘Story of self’ is “... a way to share the values that define who you are – not as abstract principles, but as lived experience.” (Ganz, 2011, p. 283) Here Ganz draws on narrative psychology (Hammack, 2008), where the telling of a story about one self is telling the story of one’s life, where professional experience is replaced with lived experiences. ‘The story of us’ should be seen as collective stories threaded together, similar to the master plots of Iversen. “How does the storyteller become part of this larger story? Learning to tell a story of us requires deciding who the “us” is... Our cultures are repositories of stories. Community stories about challenges we have faced, why we stood up to them – our values and our shared goals – and how we overcame them are woven throughout our political beliefs and religious traditions.” (Ganz, 2011, p. 285) Ganz describes the identity of “us” as many groups, yet for this dissertation the ‘us’ described and referenced will most often be the American people, and for this reason the term people is introduced as part of the *narrative of the people*. Finally ‘the story of now’ refers to the challenge of the moment, what the “us” and the “self” is asked to act upon. Especially this third story level refers to the need for open-ended narratives in politics, where something has to be done by the audience to remedy the “Conflict”, as Stefan Iversen describes it in his research (Iversen, 2013). This third story level is also worth studying in the rhetoric of a president, particularly if considering the function of presidential rhetoric. While this activist approach to the use of narratives is relevant when considering a presidential campaign, this dissertation suggests a more narrowed focus on epideictic discourse when considering the use of narratives within presidential rhetoric. The elements of epideictic speech allow for a more clear identification of narratives in the statements that seek to

formulate values and establish specific worldviews for the audience, before potentially turning them towards political action. Because of this, the third traditional narrative theme of the presidents is presented as the narrative of the nation, relating to narratives that summarize a broader identity for the nation, and in particular how this identity relates to other nations in international affairs.

With the above distinctions in mind the three presidential narrative themes of President Obama are described as: narrative of self, narrative of people, and narrative of nation. In this chapter the initial conceptions of the three themes are presented. The themes will be developed in the following case-based chapters that focus on a rhetorical criticism and close reading of a number of texts by Barack Obama, where the emphasis will be on the texts themselves rather than the reception of them. All three themes can be found across the speeches examined in the dissertation. The themes should therefore not be seen as completely separated; rather their interplay can in some instances be the very goal of their use for a presidential candidate such as President Obama. The ability to show a kinship between a personal and national narrative can be crucial for a political candidate in a nation-wide election. Yet, pointing out the elements of each of the presidential narrative themes separately, and their ability to convey certain aspects of the presidency and the person holding it, is valuable. The value in this separating approach can be to clarify details of the narratives being told, rather than remaining at a broad level in the description of the use of narrative rhetoric, which has been criticized by a number of scholars as detrimental to the very practice of rhetorical criticism done on the use of narratives.

Narrative of Self

Establishing ethos is important for any political candidate who wishes to maintain a trustworthy relationship with his constituents. As one rhetorical scholar recently put it in an article: “Indeed, Aristotle famously regarded the rhetorical display of character as the most persuasive appeal of all...” (Hoff-Clausen, 2013, p. 428) As an aid to establishing and maintaining ethos, it can be important for the audience to know who the speaker is, not just what he has to say. A presidential candidate therefore often has to place his personal character at the center of his campaign. He can do so by producing a relevant and gripping back story – a narrative of self that can draw in the audience. While ethos relates to the perception of a speaker, narrative relates to how this perception is constructed through selected content and specific forms with which to present the content. This narrative of self is often initiated or bolstered through either a self-published biography or an even more overtly political publication, bordering on a manifesto for the campaign.

Recent examples of this can be seen with newcomer to the presidential candidate field, Marco Rubio, who published his book *An American Son: A Memoir* in 2012, or Republican candidate in the 2012 election, Mitt Romney's publication *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness* from 2010. The same can be said for Barack Obama who published two self-authored books before his presidential campaign in 2008. The politically oriented book *Audacity of Hope* (2006), and the more traditional memoir *Dreams from My Father* (1995). Both publications were drawn upon in the 2008 election speeches by Barack Obama and his speech writers. The more personal narrative themes of Barack Obama, however, were often drawn from themes dealt with in *Dreams from My Father* to establish a background story for Barack Obama, and to create a particular ethos or persona for him as a candidate as well as a blueprint for his narrative of self. All of this was subsequently used in Barack Obama's speeches during the 2008 campaign. Barack Obama's role as narrator and relation to the *act* of narrating his personal narrative will be analyzed, along with his use of the narrative elements to establish his narrative of the self. This thematic approach will show how Barack Obama has consciously shaped and selected experiences and encounters with the people of his life to appeal to and create narrative identification with the American people. Other presidential politicians have done this before Barack Obama, yet as a narrator he also incorporates an openly reflective approach to the narration of his past in the memoir. This shared reflection with his audience on the narration process itself situates Barack Obama in a modern media setting. It can, however, also be seen as the source for the continued high level of skepticism President Obama has been met with by the media and by some political opponents regarding his narrative of the self, with the continued birther campaign⁴⁶ as a more persistent negation of Barack Obama's own description of his life.

Narrative of the People

With the theme of a narrative of the people, the dissertation will discuss how an emphasis on the narrative aspect of constitutive rhetoric can help create a better understanding of

⁴⁶ *Birther campaign* refers to the conspiracy theories regarding Barack Obama's status as a natural-born citizen of the United States. The issue is relevant because Barack Obama would be, under Article Two of the U.S. Constitution, ineligible to be President of the United States if he could not prove that he had been born a U.S. citizen. Great emphasis has been placed on especially Barack Obama's birth certificate. The theories have been so persistent that the Obama administration at different times has sought to end speculation both through further documentation as well as with humor at events such as the yearly White House Correspondents' Dinner.

how U.S. presidents attempt to become the voice for the American people in their speeches through the use of narrative rhetoric.

The concept of national identities has been discussed by many, including Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (2006 edition) and Maurice Charland in his article on the constitution of a shared identity for the Quebecois in Canada (1987). Rhetorical scholar Vanessa Beasley has also written about the possibility of establishing a larger collective identity for nations with an emphasis on presidential rhetoric in the United States (Beasley, 2004). The president's role as the voice of the people often requires an establishment of said 'people' in the speeches given as a representative of the presidency. This constitution of the people therefore also often has a political goal which can influence who is included in "we, the people". While concepts from Charland and Anderson's texts will help set up the theoretical framework for discussing the narrative of the people, Beasley's work in particular is relevant to include in the discussion of this particular presidential narrative theme. Beasley draws her material from presidential speeches throughout the 20th century, and this can therefore aid the dissertation's historical foundation, when the case of Barack Obama is held up against the traditions of the presidency. Beasley's research has shown that the attempts by presidents to describe a common identity for the diverse U.S. population have often been at the expense of minority groups, such as African Americans and other ethnic minority groups. Working with the theme of a narrative of the people, it can be argued that President Obama attempts this inclusion of minority Americans in an American national identity in more direct ways than previous presidents. President Obama does so by using major ceremonial speeches to include historic events of minority rights struggles. Through narrative sparks, anecdotes, and arcs focusing on the American people's struggle over civil rights, President Obama attempts to place the American people within a larger narrative of civil rights progression. Yet while President Obama in this way suggests a more inclusive approach to the narrative of the American people, his approach to the presidential narrative theme, however, also excludes large groups of Americans who fail to locate themselves within President Obama's suggested narrative of the people.

Narrative of the Nation

Throughout the history of the U.S. presidency, presidents have actively referenced the country's history in their rhetoric and even tried to bend or restructure the meaning of the nation's past to signify a new path forward towards the future. With the theme of the narrative of nation the use of known and lesser known moments in American history in the speeches by presidents

resemble that of plot points in a narrative. With an emphasis on moments of crisis and eventual triumph, the moments often function as a reaffirmation of the ‘idea’ and ‘mission’ of the United States. Internationally the president uses these moments both as an ambassador for the United States in the World, but also as a first diplomat of the nation in negotiating relationships between nations. Because of this second role for the president abroad, the moments referred to often center on relations between the United States and their allies in the foreign addresses by the president. These speeches can be used in rhetorical criticism to show how history is given an active presence and drawn into the present via a narrative structuring, which links the United States’ past together with the host nation’s past. President Obama, as presidents have done before him, positions the past in terms of historical plot points of world history, and argues for why these points relate to the international audience he is addressing. President Obama, however, also differs from his predecessors in this presidential narrative theme, due in part to the context he has had to relate to in a post 9/11 world; the limits to U.S. military power revealed by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the general view of a United States as a declining power on the world stage; as well as a decline in the international legitimacy of the claim to “U.S. exceptionalism” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014). While the United States has faced these dilemmas before, the rhetorical response by Barack Obama represents a new development in international relations for the presidency. What President Obama does differently with this narrative of the nation is the inclusion of moments that are not necessarily triumphant for the United States, thereby leaving out a clear teleological progression in the narrative of the nation. Barack Obama instead presents the possibility of momentary failure in a continuing process of change for the nation’s identity and purpose.

Narrative Structures: Sparks, Anecdotes and Arcs

While the three narrative themes presented above focus on the content of the narrative rhetoric President Obama and previous presidents have used in their speeches, the actual form where within the narrative themes are presented can also benefit from a similar categorization with the following terms: narrative anecdotes, narrative sparks, and narrative arcs.

Narrative anecdotes refer to narratives that are self-contained plots within a singular speech, with both unnamed and named characters, direct or indirect use of settings, and some kind of progression through a plot. There is often a particular message at the end of the narrative anecdote to justify its inclusion in the speech. For instance, Barack Obama’s reference to the 108-year-old African American woman Ann Nixon Cooper in his 2008 election victory speech can be described

as a narrative anecdote. This is because the narrative describes one person's experience of different moments in U.S. history, with references to the setting of Election Day 2008. The narrative anecdote has a clear progression both for the individual protagonist and for the nation, and the message of the narrative anecdote is the ability of the United States to achieve civil progress over time.

Narrative sparks should be understood as smaller statements that can ignite a narrative in the minds of the audience, which reflects the intended values of the speaker and creates coherence in his message. This can be the mentioning of specific historic events, or the narrative spark can also be a sentence that brings to mind an everyday person or a historic person whose values, experiences, or words have significance for the speech being given. The audience can only comprehend these narrative sparks in the speech, if they consider the contextual theme the sparks are set to ignite, in what they are a reference to. The narrative sparks become referential trigger points that are designed to set off certain connotations depending on the audience present for the speech. But that does not remove the sparks from what can be understood as a narrative, since they can still contain characters, settings and progression of a plot in the smallest sense. The imagery created by connecting a moment in a speech to previous moments help create the progression described by scholars as essential to the narrative form. An elaborate anecdote or a paragraph long history lesson is, therefore, not always needed to create the sense of a narrative theme in a speech, if the narrative sparks are placed effectively throughout the speech.

The narrative arc as a term can be used to describe continued references to a narrative theme made over time, and the strength of this comes from the concept of structure in a narrative, which can tie together messages across one speech, or even more speeches brought together by an overarching theme or vision. While this term resembles that of Iversen's master plot, for instance, the reason for using a different definition is to place an emphasis on the structural element of such a large narrative, and how it resembles a fictional narrative in its attempt to establish a believable progression for the plot and characters it contains. The structure of a narrative arc uses the narrative sparks, elements, anecdotes, and/or plots from the single speech to create a larger overreaching narrative, and establishes a flow for the president's message on a topic or for a candidate's campaign theme. In a sense individual speeches can be seen as entry points for the audience to the narrative arc of a presidency or a campaign. A published memoir can be used in the same way, as we shall see, when considering how the candidate wants to be understood as a presidential speaker.

It is important to recognize the difference between these kinds of narrative structures, fully and partly formed within the single speeches. Narratives are not merely created through small vignettes within the single speech, but also across speeches via small pieces, or fragments, of a larger vision, which the speaker introduces over time. Narrative structures then can both be seen as building blocks in the individual text, as well as stemming from certain topoi, which is similar to George Lakoff's theory of how language triggers certain connotations for people.

Below is a broadly defined summary chart of the presidential narrative themes combined with the three major narrative structures, and examples of how they can be used as concepts for the rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric.

Presidential Narrative themes:	Narrative structures:	Sparks	Anecdote	Arc
Narrative of self		Significant life event or influential person referenced by the speaker	Family story or life lesson learned	Focus on character development. For instance, how a political view was formed or understanding the responsibility of having a family
Narrative of People		Name of either historically known persons and/or regular citizens	Story of named or unnamed American	Focus on people's influence on history and political issues
Narrative of Nation		Historic events named briefly in a word or sentence	Story focused on an event in the history of the nation, or in describing another nation	Focus on relationship between nations / or to the nation's own history

Political Storytelling: Propaganda and/or Epideictic Necessity for the Presidency

In an article for the *Living Book on Narratology*⁴⁷, Stefan Iversen argues that there is still an untapped potential for narrative research on political rhetoric (Iversen, 2014). Tapping into this research potential is the objective of this dissertation, with the emphasis on the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric. Yet the use of narratives in political discourse has also been dealt with by other contemporary scholars, and an increased criticism of the use of what is described as storytelling is emerging. This final section of the chapter on narrative rhetoric will both examine this critique and function as a transition into the next subject of the dissertation: presidential rhetoric.

The proliferation of the narrative term in news media and in different professions often focuses on the abilities of storytelling to include and create identification for audiences. For some, storytelling merely references the act of telling narratives (McAdams, 1993). Yet the use of storytelling in a political setting has also been described in more negative terms in recent research on political rhetoric. Political storytelling, however, in this dissertation's opinion, can hold an important and constructive function in shedding a light on issues of national identity and influencing national conversations on race and gender issues. The different views of storytelling's problems and benefits, however, point to a need to discuss the ethical concerns of the use of narratives in connection with political rhetoric.

A representative of the more critical approach to storytelling is French researcher Christian Salmon, who has written the book *Storytelling: Bewitching the modern mind* (2010). We have seen more positive approaches to storytelling and politics, such as the lecturer Marshall Ganz' description of the presence and sincerity achieved through different levels of story (Story of You, Story of Us, Story of Now). Linguist George Lakoff can be seen as another positive voice for the active use of storytelling in the shape of framing messages, which he has predominantly promoted to the Democratic Party in U.S. politics. Salmon on the other hand is far less optimistic about the use of narratives in politics. Researcher Peter Brooks also argues for the problem of storytelling: "...storytelling is a moral chameleon; it can be used to support the worse as well as the better cause, to promote dominant as well as marginal narratives. President Bush's great American stories exclude as much as they include." (Brooks, 2001) Salmon sees this political use of storytelling as an

⁴⁷ Available at: livinghandbookofnarrative.com - <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narratives-rhetorical-discourse>

invasion, due to its presence in consumerism, branding, military structures, and politics (Salmon, 2010, p. VII). Salmon is focused on a great number of venues for the use of narrative, as it may be evident from the list. The emphasis here will be placed on Salmon's critique of the use of narratives within politics: "At the politico-ideological level, stories are used to capture people's attention, to make the actions of those who govern us look credible and to allow them to win power... the goal is to involve the masses, and to synchronize and mobilize individuals and emotions." (p. VIII)

The problem with the increased use of narratives in different professions is, according to Salmon, that if narratives are made equivalent with logical reasoning, it opens up for false stories that can be described as propaganda, leading to the smoke screen of politics. The essence of Salmon's critique can be seen in the following statement, but in the same statement can also be found the reason why narratives can be viewed as having a more positive and needed role in presidential rhetoric:

"The great narratives that punctuate human history – from Homer to Tolstoy and from Sophocles to Shakespeare – told of universal myths and transmitted the lessons learned by past generations. They passed on lessons in wisdom that were the fruit of cumulative experience. Storytelling goes in the opposite direction: it tacks artificial narratives on to reality, blocks exchanges, and saturates symbolic space with its series and stories. It does not talk about past experience. It shapes behaviors and channels flows of emotion." (Salmon, 2010, p. 10)

While Salmon with the above statement criticizes storytelling much in the same way rhetoric as a whole has been criticized, his description of the value of 'great narratives' points to the need for commonly held stories that can speak to universal values across generations, and make sure that the past is not forgotten in a perpetual forward motion that disregards the history that has gone before. It is exactly this ability to speak on behalf of the "timeless moment" (Jamieson & Campbell, 2008, p. 46) connected to history, rather than only the present that justifies the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric, since narrative rhetoric when used for this purpose can constitute a clearer understanding of values for the audience.

Hegemonic Narratives

The increased use of narratives is seen as a problem for Salmon and others, yet the more critical issue at hand for political rhetoric is how certain narratives end up establishing dominant perceptions of the events they describe. Stories do not exist by themselves, but are in play with other competing stories telling of the same events. While the stories may have different

objectives and audiences, there eventually emerges a dominant understanding of an event, where some stories become more accepted than others, relating the issue of storytelling to the theory of hegemonic discourse, as we saw described by Foucault earlier. For Salmon narratives presented to the public compete in similar fashion: “The huge accumulation of stories produced by modern societies has given birth to a new narrative order in which stories of power clash with stories of resistance, and have to pass the credibility test.” (Salmon, 2010, p. IX) This is an important point to consider when viewing presidential rhetoric and the use of narratives, since the presidency represents both a public institution with significant authority as well as a more intimate and personal sense of government responsibility in the shape of *one* man/woman. The worldview presented by the president in office is often in correlation with dominating narratives on events due to the traditions that binds the agenda of the individual president to the office of the presidency⁴⁸. Yet moments of national crisis, for instance, offer the individual in office the chance to reinterpret the dominant stories that have come under threat by the crisis.

While stories can certainly be used to deflect inferred critique of political agendas, or change the purpose of political decisions in the view of the public, there is still the fundamental attraction to narratives that can allow a politician to aid the understanding of issues and identity questions of a nation in crisis. If these narratives avoid the temptation to distort the event, they may help further the understanding of it, rather than hinder the truth from being told as suggested by Salmon.

The main opposition of this dissertation to Salmon’s critique of the concept of storytelling is, firstly, that the smoothing over of events, and the change of their historical meaning is something that has occurred before “storytelling” became an outspoken technique of presidential rhetoric and commented on by the media, as we shall see in the following chapter. For instance, Vanessa Beasley’s observations of the use of “you, the people” can be compared to the propaganda aspects of Salmon’s critique. This is particularly true with epideictic speech. It will be argued that President Obama contributes with a more ‘rippled approach’ to history and the people described, wherein new ideas of U.S. history are presented that may stir the seemingly tranquil surface of the national self-image. In this sense, narrative is not only a smoke screen, but can also be educational. Secondly, Salmon connects the history of spin doctors to the use of narratives, rather than to the presidency

⁴⁸ I would, however, suggest that Obama with his narratives opens up for contested narratives – perhaps not resistant to the majority narrative – yet still a challenge to previously held conceptions of the American narrative of nation, people, and its president.

itself. President Abraham Lincoln spoke on the Union and meaning of the Civil War with a specific view. President Thomas Jefferson spoke on the emerging party system. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy created presidential personas based on their personal lives, which they used as part of their rhetoric. Thirdly, the focus in this dissertation is on the presidential speeches themselves in a close reading of them, rather than the spin of their messages in different media and by commentators from different sides of the political aisle.

The main argument in the following chapter on presidential rhetoric will then be to show how the use of narratives is a part of the presidency and the bully pulpit, rather than something ‘tagged’ onto the rhetoric of presidents by spin doctors.

Chapter 3. The Use of Narratives in Presidential Rhetoric

Introduction

"National story-teller", "Interpreter-in-Chief", or "Voice-of-the-Nation", the U.S. president has been given many titles for the rhetorical roles he must fulfill while in office. The president often has to establish his right and responsibility to speak for the entire nation in these roles directly on a national stage. The need to legitimate the presidential speaker position has led to what is described in a recent book on the Obama presidency as "heroic expectations." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014) The term refers to the gap between individual words and actual powers of the presidency. Yet it is not only the increased use of presidential rhetoric that has created this gap. It is also the traditions of the presidency that have established the high expectations to the performance of individual presidents. There have always been high expectations of the president. These expectations occur through the glorification of history and the previous presidents holding office, and the words of past presidents await the incoming president as a rhetorical heritage. What this historic emphasis has led to is "... the president in the public imagination as the nation's hero rather than as the nation's chief executive." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 7) The expectation gap (Waterman & Jenkins-Smith & Silva, 1999) has created the need to articulate the purpose of the presidential speaker position itself. This need has throughout the history of the presidency had an influence on the development of both presidential rhetoric, as well as the president's role in the political system in the United States. In some instances, U.S. presidents have sought to strengthen their political influence by (re-)interpreting their role in the system through rhetoric. In her book *The President as interpreter-in-chief* (1991), Mary E. Stuckey describes the presidency as a "fluid institution" (Stuckey, 1991, p. 1) meaning that it changes over time in a combination "...of constitutional mandate, established practice, and the personal style and preferences of the current occupant." (Stuckey, 1991, p. 35) The balance between these traditional and personal elements of influence will also be the emphasis of this chapter.

Through their work on analyzing speech genres of the U.S. Presidency, the researchers Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell have presented the argument that the president on certain occasions has the opportunity with his rhetoric to both expand the powers of the U.S. presidency and achieve rhetorical capital with which to lead the country. (Jamieson & Campbell, 2008, p. 28) In these speech situations, there is often a conscious interpretation or reiteration of the

presidential role itself, of what it means to be a leader for the nation, as well as a definition of the values that the nation is based upon. What will be emphasized in this chapter is the use of narratives in this rhetorical interpretation/reiteration tradition of the presidency, and why this use of narratives can be seen as a ‘positive’ aspect of presidential rhetoric, not only a problematic evolution of presidential spin, as we saw with Salmon’s description of political storytelling in the previous chapter.

The emphasis on narrative rhetoric is relevant in a discussion of the US presidency itself as an institution, due to the ceremonial traditions that have accumulated around the presidency over the years. Focusing on the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric is also relevant for this reason, since epideictic elements are used by presidential speakers in both ceremonial speeches as well as political speeches. The presence of narrative as a term in the research done on presidential rhetoric is a third reason to deal with the term more closely. Because of these distinctions in the role narrative as a term can play, the dissertation’s focus is both on the practice of using narratives in presidential rhetoric (emic approach), as well as the method used by scholars to describe the presence of such narratives (etic approach).

In this chapter there will initially be a focus on the discussion surrounding the research done on presidential rhetoric itself. The U.S. presidency will then briefly be discussed from a historic, developmental perspective with an emphasis on the importance of establishing an identity for both the president and the people he represents. The term “rhetorical presidency” (Tulis, 1988) will be discussed to illustrate the debate on how rhetoric has had an influence on the presidency in terms of establishing the identity of the president and the people. Finally, an overview of research on President Ronald Reagan will be presented to discuss the use of narrative rhetoric for present day presidents, and to more precisely point out where President Obama differentiates himself from his predecessors.

Where the previous chapter’s main point was to discuss what a ‘narrative’ constituted and how to approach rhetorical texts with an eye on the presence of narratives, this chapter’s focus will be on how narrative analysis can be a beneficial analytical approach to presidential rhetoric. This chapter will show how the understanding of narrative rhetoric can be seen as an essential part of presidential rhetoric, not just for the study of President Barack Obama’s rhetoric and the themes he presents in his speeches.

Presidents before President Obama have used similar narrative themes, and these presidents’ structural use of narratives in their speeches can be identified in a similar fashion as well. The

context of the media landscape and shifts in speaker traditions have made the use of narratives more clear to the media and the broad public audience, and to academic research on presidential rhetoric. What these rhetorical and political developments suggest is that a narrative understanding of presidential rhetoric is relevant, because the narrative approach helps describe both the structured presentation of values in presidential speeches, as well as the content of these values. It is argued that narrative rhetoric in this way can be seen as part of the presidency, because it is the traditions and developing media and political context surrounding the office, which has created an ever greater need for a president, compared to other public speakers, to establish greater and smaller narratives in his rhetoric. The issues we will deal with in the coming case study chapters are how President Barack Obama himself as the current president uses the narratives, and how his balance between the traditions of the office, and the changing national context of demographics and media use has an influence on his narratives.

Presidential Rhetoric

When engaging in the study of presidential rhetoric it is important to consider two major and conflicting views on the research field itself. The first view can be described as the skeptical approach and one of its main proponents is the political scientist George Edwards. As an argument against Neustadt's "power to persuade" view of the presidency George Edwards has "...demonstrated that the president's ability to influence Congress is marginal at best. Edwards argues that the president's failure to move Congress is a reflection of a persistent inability to move public opinion..." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 9) Edwards argues that the value of presidential rhetoric can only be measured with a proved connection between speech and opinion polls or in connection with an election (through the idea of mandate politics (Edwards, 1999). This argument focuses on a 'cause and effect' approach, where direct correlation needs to be proved between speech and its impact in order for one to speak of influential rhetoric. Little evidence has been found to substantiate claims of a president's rhetoric direct political impact on voters' opinions according to Edwards. Edward's argument, then, is that the speeches of a candidate/president are given on deaf ears, since evidence cannot be seen in subsequent poll numbers. Connected with this view of presidential rhetoric is an argument for a renewed crisis of leadership in the White House⁴⁹,

⁴⁹ The previous crisis came as a reaction to the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal.

where the presidency as an institution has failed or stopped leading the nation altogether (Vaughn, 2013). This signifies an impotence of the bully pulpit.

The second major view on presidential rhetoric can be described with the help of the concept of a national identity. With this approach, rhetoric is about establishing a common identity (drawing on Kenneth Burke's understanding of rhetoric as a means to establish consubstantiality through identification), and getting people to think about who they are through a moral frame (Lakoff, 2004). A president's speaker role is not only meant to address political issues directly and influence them. His role is also to address themes and values of a nation's self-perception with a focus on more long term impacts on the national identity. For instance which role minorities and immigrants should play in the idea of the United States, how far civil rights should be extended, and what the relationship between Government and the individual citizen should be?

The problem with the first view is that it is too narrow an approach to the speaker role of the presidency, which only focuses on the immediate reaction to a speech. Instead one should consider the theory of, for instance, George Lakoff and his view on moral framing, which has the ability to influence people's opinion over time by setting the frame of the debate (Lakoff, 2004). Presidential rhetoric can be viewed at a broader discursive level, as a national conversation, where the president, if he has an established level of ethos, based on his own person and image of the presidency, can speak more clearly to the nation than other political speakers are able to.

Professor in rhetoric David Zarefsky is another source who has weighed in on the debate regarding the influence of presidential rhetoric in U.S. politics. Zarefsky is in favor of the long-term and framing approach to presidential rhetoric, where the president still actively uses his words to lead the nation (Zarefsky, 2004). Zarefsky often adopts a historical perspective to argue his point as he did at a conference in 2013, held in Middelburg, Netherlands on presidential rhetoric. Here Zarefsky answered the question of whether rhetoric plays a greater role for presidents today than it has done previously in the following way: "Rhetoric has always been there. It has evolved along with media and rhetorical research understanding of the presidency. The function of rhetoric has been there, but it has been *performed* differently." (Zarefsky, 2013) The same can be said about the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric. The stories about the president and the presidency have been there from the beginning, but the use and content of them has changed. With the two conflicting views in mind, the following sections will focus on the development in both theory and practice relating to the use of narratives in the presidency.

Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of the Presidency

While the debate in scholarly circles concerning the actual influence of presidential rhetoric is evident. Over the years there have also been a number of researchers that have described the developments of the powers of the presidency as increasing both in connection with rhetoric and separate to it. In *Presidential Power*, (1960) political scientist Richard Neustadt famously argued that the president's power was through persuasion (Neustadt, 1960, p. 11), a view of the presidency that has both been used to argue for and against the influence of presidential rhetoric. Neustadt himself was aware of the gap that existed between the image of power and the actual power that presidents have. Because of this gap they needed to make use of persuasion and bargaining tactics to achieve their policy goals, both towards congress, and internally in the executive branch, where the president had to persuade his members of cabinet etc. Here Neustadt saw the president as competing among many to win the argument on an issue. The influence of Neustadt's contribution to the study of presidential rhetoric is described by Mary Stuckey as beginning "... a shift away from formal, functional, and constitutional understandings of the presidency toward an informal model of bargaining and persuasion." (Stuckey, 1991, p. 4)

In a system of shared government, the negotiation also went beyond internal politics in the executive branch, to the rest of the Government. Yet the president was arguing, both with his staff and with Congress, on behalf of the presidency, giving him substantial ethos in the arguments, as long as the presidency was respected. Because of this needed respect for the presidency in achieving bargaining powers, the president needed to maintain a public reputation. He could still fail at times, as long as these failures did not lead to a pattern that influenced his reputation. This also tied into the more public tactics Presidents could take, when trying to win a political argument, for instance, by "going public" (Kernell, 2006). This connection between ethos and ability to persuade also ties into the personal aspect of the presidency, an aspect that would gather even more focus with the debate surrounding the concept of *The Imperial Presidency*.

The concept was presented in written form by historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. in *The Imperial Presidency* (1973). *The Imperial Presidency* was proposed as a way to reflect developments in the presidency's powers over the decades, particular during war crises: "War had accustomed those in charge of foreign policy to a complacent faith in the superior intelligence and disinterestedness of the executive branch." (Schlesinger, 1973, p. 123) This became particular true during World War II and onwards. Schlesinger went so far as to argue that the presidency had exceeded its constitutional limits. This was evident in both the expansion of the executive branch

itself as well as the broadening influence on foreign policy and war powers that the presidency had also obtained since the WWII era.

The work of Schlesinger and others continued to resonate with scholars in the light of both the escalation of the Vietnam War under President Johnson and the Watergate scandal of President Nixon. In spite of this and other cases exemplifying Schlesinger's worries of the Imperial presidency, there are today also arguments against the view of the imperial presidency than for it in academia and the media. Instead the presidency is in some cases seen as being weakened (Shesol, 2014). The general bureaucracy of the system of checks and balances and the increased checks on the president's powers following Watergate has contributed to this shift in opinion. President Obama himself has also contributed to the public view of a challenged presidency as we shall see later on. Yet in terms of the power to define national issues and acting as the representative as the voice on national issues, the presidency has lost less of its potency according to Stuckey for instance: "What happened during the terms of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon is that the presidency, while appearing to lose so much, won the debate with the media over which institution was to represent the authentic and legitimate voice of the American people...Despite the failures of Johnson and Nixon as individual presidents, the presidency as an institution won the right to be the agenda setter, to determine the issues of national debate; the American president had won the ability to be "interpreter-in-chief" of the American polity." (Stuckey, 1991, p. 90) This conclusion perhaps overlooks the immediate weariness of the presidency the American people felt post-Watergate, and in similar fashion at the end of the W. Bush-administration, which occurred after Stuckey's research was published. Yet the relationship between the media and the presidents in terms of being able to speak with a voice for an intended audience of the American people does seem to still favor the president on issues of values and national identity.

Historic Development of the U.S. Presidency and its Relationship to Narrative Rhetoric

The President as a Leader or Manager of the Nation: *The Rhetorical Presidency*

Whether or not the president is seen as imperial today, in public opinion and the media, the president *is* seen as a political leader in the United States' system of government. Yet it was not this role which was intended for the occupant of the White House to begin with (Zarefsky, 2004). In formulating the U.S. constitution, the president's role was primarily intended to be as an active

political enforcer or manager of the executive branch of the political system that could execute the laws adopted by Congress, the legislative branch. The president was not supposed to act politically, but act impartially, and according to the policy discussions that took place in Congress. The relationship between the three branches of U.S. government was set up with a number of checks and balances, with the goal of both protecting the interests of political minorities as well as hinder one branch of government in gaining too much independent power. The president, therefore was placed in a position of perpetual negotiation, where, although the candidate had won a national election and a mandate of the people, might not have the parliamentary majority to follow through on the mandate of his own personal election victory. Yet in spite of this, the leadership role of the government is today expected to befall the president.

While there is a debate regarding the president's actual power, as well as the gap between the image of presidential power and actual power, the president still has the most far reaching and most public speaking position in the United States today. How he uses this position is part of this dissertation's interest. The president's position makes him an authority on most subjects he speaks on, regardless of his own technical prowess. But just as influential as this 'expert' role, is the role that places the president closer to that of national-storyteller or narrator-in-chief than other political figures in the United States. He enters into this speaker position due to his interpretive and ceremonial tasks, and the larger public audience he has to address on these occasions.

In 1988 Jeffrey K. Tulis published the book *The Rhetorical Presidency*. The book was a culmination of a number of articles on the subject, and it described how the U.S. presidency had developed into a more active political role for the holder of the office. According to Tulis, American presidents in the 19th century had in most cases (with Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln as exceptions) come to terms with the above-mentioned relationship between Congress and the president, where the president was seen as the weaker party in the political system of checks and balances. Furthermore, the president was increasingly elected through the will of the party bosses, as the party conventions were established throughout the middle of the century⁵⁰. But at the beginning of the 20th century a change occurred in the presidents' view of their role in government. In his book, Tulis highlights two presidents who helped initiate this shift towards a more independent, active, and rhetorical role for the president: Presidents Theodore Roosevelt

⁵⁰ A more detailed description of the development of the National Party Conference will be included in the chapter on narratives in a campaign setting.

(Republican president from 1901-1909) and Woodrow Wilson (Democratic president from 1913-1921).

The Practitioner and the Professor

Of the two presidents, Tulis describes President Theodore Roosevelt as the practitioner, who distanced himself from the nineteenth century subordinate role of the presidency. Instead President T. Roosevelt saw the presidency as an opportunity to shake up the political landscape and speak from what he called ‘The Bully Pulpit’. President T. Roosevelt broke with the tradition of the presidency by stepping out of the, in principle, impartial political role that was assigned to the president. Instead he became highly active politically with policy initiatives of his own making. President T. Roosevelt sought progressive policies designed to instigate significant changes in American society, and he did not always listen to the voices of his own Republican Party, if these spoke for other interests. Instead, President T. Roosevelt ‘went his own presidential way’, if that would help the political issue he was arguing for implementing. President T. Roosevelt in this way represented the active president who sidestepped Congress and went straight to the American people to gain support for his policies instead – what Zarefsky describes as “going public” (Zarefsky, 2004). President T. Roosevelt, for instance, dramatized the contemporary conservation movement in the national conscience to such an extent that it helped shape the meaning of the term within the progressive movement (Dorsey, 2013). President T. Roosevelt was also a more popular and personally open president than his predecessors – a celebrity among the people: He wrote about his time as a cowboy, to solidify his image as frontiersman⁵¹; He installed a boxing ring in the White House; and most importantly, from a rhetorical view point, he traveled the country to promote the discussion of political matters and win people over to his side of the debates. President T. Roosevelt coined the term “The Bully Pulpit” to describe the great opportunity the presidency gave of speaking directly on political issues. From the Bully Pulpit, President T. Roosevelt appealed directly through his rhetoric to the American people as well as to contemporary news media. President T. Roosevelt in this way saw the presidency as a way to access the public in a more direct way than previous presidents. Although President T. Roosevelt in this way could be seen as a populist politician, his goal, according to Tulis, was exactly to avoid having true demagogues taking up room in the public debate (Tulis, 1988, p. 111). President T. Roosevelt believed that the role as

⁵¹ Contemporary Republican Senator Mark Hanna has been quoted as responding in the following way to Theodore Roosevelt becoming president: "Now look! That damned cowboy is president of the United States."

the ‘voice of the nation’ was only intended for the president, since no one else was better able to express what was necessary for the nation⁵². This also entailed a change for the presidency in line with Neustadt’s main argument on presidential communication, according to Stuckey: ”Where the early presidents had led through example and policy, the presidents following Roosevelt would increasingly rely on the arts of persuasion.” (Stuckey, 1991 p. 25)

The Democratic President and Professor Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) later follow up on President T. Roosevelt’s proactive approach to the use of rhetoric from the White House. In President Wilson’s attempt to change the perception of the presidency in the political system, he added a more theoretical approach to the presidency, and what it meant to speak on behalf of it. President Wilson’s background as professor perhaps influenced him in seeking a more fundamental discussion of the Constitution’s understanding of the president’s role. His goal was to establish a more long-term doctrine that could help change the role of the presidency in the system of government. President Wilson believed, in a similar fashion to President T. Roosevelt, that the president was the only political representation who could speak for the entire nation. Other political bodies were too often in favor of certain political interests. President Wilson’s vision of the constitution was that the text had to be interpreted by the present, rather than understood as a static document set in stone at the founding of the United States. President Wilson instead saw the political system as a living organism (Tulis, 1988, p. 121), whose parts had to work together and gradually develop over time as the United States developed as a nation. The fear of demagogues in society had increased since President T. Roosevelt’s time in the White House, according to Tulis. President Wilson therefore believed, like his predecessor, that the president had to be able to stand tall on the national stage to act as a counterweight to these potential ‘rabble-rousers’.

One way President Wilson sought to strengthen the president’s position in the system of checks and balances through rhetoric was to restore the tradition of holding the State of the Union speech in Congress (Zarefsky, 2008). This had not been the case since President Thomas Jefferson decided to deliver the annual address in written form, rather than as a speech, which his two predecessors, Presidents John Adams and George Washington, had done. President Wilson’s reintroduction of the tradition of delivering the State of the Union in person as a speech in front of Congress has given the US president one of his strongest speaking traditions in the political

⁵² This is an opinion shared by other presidents. President Harry S. Truman for instance saw the presidency as the lobbyist for the people, as the president represents a majority of the people in the federal system of government (Source: *The Truman Library & Museum*, Independence, Missouri: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/speaks.htm>).

calendar in the United States. In the speech the president no longer simply managerially reports about the nation's state, as it says in the Constitution that he must do. The speech serves as an agenda setting opportunity, where the President in a role as political leader can suggest which political issues should be the focus for the next year in Congress (Jamieson & Campbell, 2008, p. 138). The context surrounding the speech, also helps to emphasize the relationship between Congress and the president, and the event is associated with a certain reverence for the presidential office, even from political opponents in Congress⁵³. The ongoing development of Mass media throughout the 20th century has yielded the speech an even greater public status, first on radio with President Calvin Coolidge, then President Harry Truman via Television, and most recently the internet. Most of the State of the Union speeches given by President Obama could for instance be followed in an "enhanced" version online, where pedagogical graphics and graphs helped explain the words of President Obama's speech, as well as emphasize the points and historic connections the President wanted to get across. These different developments in the context of the speech have given the President an audience far larger than those present in Congress.

Another important rhetorical choice President Wilson made, which has had a lasting impact on the role of the presidency, is in his definition of the United States' role as a nation that is part of the world, rather than set apart from it. With his advocacy for the United States' obligation to participate in WW I and his use of the stump speech to argue for the League of Nation's led the way for the interventionist approach of American foreign policy, and thereby also the role of the president as both first diplomat and commander-in-chief of an increasingly internationally acting army.

Where President Theodore Roosevelt practiced a new and more active presidential communication style that also influenced the character of the presidency, President Woodrow Wilson strengthened the theoretical and historical foundation for this argument for a more proactive-influential role for the presidency in US politics. President Franklin Roosevelt, who was elected to his first of four terms in office in 1932, can be said to be the president who cemented this 'active approach' to the presidency. President F. Roosevelt's contribution to this development was his role as media expert, where he was able to place himself at the center of people's homes via

⁵³ The speech is always given in the House of Representatives. The Vice President and the Speaker of the House sits behind the president as he speaks. Present are also the sitting members of Congress from both chambers; senators and representatives. The Supreme Court judges, the president's cabinet and senior military officials are also present. The gathering of the political power elite under one roof, thereby also highlights the president's unique position in the political system at this moment. It is *he* who speaks to Congress and Congress who listens.

radio. As this quotation describes it: ”...by comparison with Franklin Roosevelt, 'all previous presidents were Trappists who didn't even talk to themselves.'” (Stuckey, 1991, p. 30)

In particular, President F. Roosevelt's use of the radio medium can be described as a combination of President T. Roosevelt's personal style with the possibilities of speaking in this way to a much larger audience through the mass medium of radio: ”With radio, the door opened for a more personalized brand of political leadership. The president could be present in the homes of the electorate, his voice part of the family circle.” (Stuckey, 1991, p. 6) President F. Roosevelt established direct contact with the population, and with the content of his fireside chats he used radio to shore up his fatherly image and maintained a more personal relationship with the American people. This use of mass media by President F. Roosevelt also meant a more focused approach on a particular aspect of president communication according to Stuckey: ”It is with Roosevelt, and through Roosevelt's use of radio, that the president was charged with defining, articulating, and focusing the national character and the national mission.” (Stuckey, 1991, p. 39)

Politically President F. Roosevelt also sought to create a more active role for the executive branch. With his descriptions of the New Deal programs in particular President F. Roosevelt sought to influence economic and social policy issues, and in the process change the way Americans saw themselves, their role as a nation in the world, their government, and their President. Based on these circumstances President F. Roosevelt is often described as the first president to represent the ‘modern presidency’ in the United States.

Presidents' Use of Rhetoric before the *Rhetorical Presidency*

While Tulis' book and the term, *the rhetorical presidency*, has become an important reference point to consider for researchers of presidential rhetoric, there have also been arguments against Tulis' conception of the ‘rhetorical presidency’, similar to the discussion of the narrative paradigm. In particular, some scholars have argued that presidents' conscious rhetorical approach to the development of the presidency and its political influence began before President Theodore Roosevelt and President Woodrow Wilson. According to David Zarefsky, for instance, the conscious approach was there from the beginning of the presidency (Zarefsky, 2008).

Already with President George Washington, the personality, and words articulating this personality, of the president played a role in electing the president, and the first president established speech traditions that were not stipulated by law. President Washington thereby took an active rhetorical role in shaping the presidency's character and communication traditions. The

Inaugural Address, for instance, has developed into a rich opportunity for (re-)elected presidents to set the tone for the president's administration and describe their own personal transition into the presidency as a covenant with the people (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008, p. 35). This creates the need for the speaker not to only address their own role, but the role of the American people in the ceremonial speech.

A further development of this tradition occurred with President Thomas Jefferson, after the election in 1800. President Jefferson had won the election after an intense and famously acrimonious campaign with his opponent, the incumbent John Adams. In his inaugural address, Jefferson therefore saw the need for an element of reconciliation after the campaign period was over. For this healing of the nation's political factions to take place, the President had to present himself as the leader of *all* the people, not only the people who had voted for him. President Jefferson did so by invoking the names of both major political parties at the moment of election: "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists" (Jefferson, 1801), and stated that while opinions had differed, the principles behind the United States were shared by all Americans regardless of whom they voted for. President Jefferson thereby solidified the role of the President as being raised above the political fray, and argued for the status as *national* leader. This rhetorical amity towards both allies and opponents in the political system is an element in the genre of the Inaugural address, which has been present ever since. It is precisely this role of the president in U.S. politics that make the speeches the president gives relevant at a national level. No other political person can perform the role as speaker of the nation with as much ethos as the president, as for example when he speaks at a memorial for a national tragedy, or during the State of the Union.

Presidents have at different times sought through rhetoric to describe their intended and proposed role in U.S. politics. In a similar fashion, narratives have been present in the traditions of the presidency, which we will discuss in the following section.

Narratives and the Presidency

Mary Stuckey begins her book *The President as interpreter-in-chief* (1991) with the following statement: "The President has become the nation's chief storyteller, its interpreter-in-chief. He tells us stories about ourselves, and in so doing he tells us what sort of people we are, how we are constituted as a community. We take from him not only our policies but our national self-identity." (Stuckey, 1991, p. 1) Stuckey's focus is on the media influence on the president's means and abilities to communicate with the public. Her emphasis is on television (yet in media terms

change occurred in particular with President Franklin Roosevelt, from whereon presidents could no longer opt out of having a public media image according to Stuckey (Stuckey, 1991, p. 2)). In spite of her media platform emphasis, her description of presidential rhetoric also fits the intention of this dissertation. Stuckey for instance describes the influence of television as creating a “dramatized society”. This increased access to drama via media for the ordinary citizen has influenced the individual’s relationship to narratives in a way that relates to the discussions that were presented in the previous chapter: “As the world “out there” becomes more complex, more unknowable, we increasingly resort to dramatic forms – storytelling – to make that world intelligible.” (Stuckey, 1991, p. 5) Stuckey believes the medium of television has increased this storytelling practice via its emphasis on visuals over arguments. This, however, also poses a problem to the content of presidential rhetoric, with mass media as the primary method for the president to speak to the people: “The present use of television, with its encouragement of dramatization, personification, and simplification, tends to inflate the political expectations of the electorate, who could become accustomed to seeing complex difficulties easily surmounted and knotty problems resolved at the end of an hour-long program.” (Stuckey, 1991, pp. 138-139) While this critique of the influence of a particular medium is reminiscent of the later critique of storytelling, which we saw examples of in the previous chapter, it will be argued in this dissertation that President Obama tends to include a more complex understanding of national problems in his use of narratives.

As described in the previous section, the presidents in the United States have through different periods (often in response to a contemporary crisis) been able to use the rhetorical traditions of the office to influence the purpose of the office itself (Zarefsky, 2008), or at least the perception of it. These changes have often come from the use of epideictic elements in the speeches given. The occasions where such content is relevant affords the president a moment of contemplation on both his own role, and the role of the people and the nation. This reflection on self and the people governed is described in nearly all the speech genres Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Khors Campbell deal with in their book on presidential speaking: *Presidents Creating the Presidency* (2008). This active use of epideictic elements in the speeches, to shape the view of the presidency and the people it governs, also entails a room for narratives dealing with characters and events that help shape the identity of the president and the people. There is a rich tradition of narratives relating to past events for the presidents to use in speeches, referring to personal experiences as well as to people and moments of historic significance for the people and the nation. But this emphasis on tradition of the office also sometimes ties down the president, in terms of what

he is able to do rhetorically. The speaker has to consider not only the context of the moment, but the historical context of the office that has been established by his predecessors. In this way the themes of narratives used in presidential rhetoric are both influenced by traditions of the presidency as well as the personal context of the individual in office.

Presidential and Personal Narrative Themes

In parallel to the argument that presidents' active use of rhetoric began before President T. Roosevelt and President Wilson, this dissertation suggests that narrative themes of self, the people, and the nation have been used before President Barack Obama, President George W. Bush and the "Great Communicator" President Ronald Reagan⁵⁴. While earlier presidents may not have used stories themselves directly in speeches, stories of President George Washington, for instance, have been used by subsequent presidents since President Washington left office. The background stories of personal valor and poor beginnings were a traditional part of the public's knowledge of presidents already in the 19th century. The use of personal background stories has in this way been part of the image of the presidency since its inception and with this the effective campaign use of stories of personal triumphs and struggles as well.

Yet two distinctions should be made in this historic consideration of narrative use in the presidency. The first is that while personal anecdotes and references to events from the life of the candidate/and president can be found in many of the speeches given today, the same kinds of narratives were presented more by intermediaries than the speakers themselves in earlier days⁵⁵. It is also valid to argue that the focus on these personal stories has increased over time in both the presidential rhetoric and the scholarship dealing with it, similar to the increased awareness of the packaging process of the presidency in the mass media (Jamieson, 1996). A sub-aspect of this increase in the narratives describing the candidates is a shift away from heroic and 'physical' narratives, such as President Kennedy's WW II exploits and President T. Roosevelt's daring-do with the Rough Riders. In the narratives of the presidential candidates' past, their background story is often focused on overcoming adversity. If the candidate was born poor, he worked his way up. If

⁵⁴ The reason for mentioning these three presidents is that contemporary scholars began writing about the use of storytelling in the executive branch with Ronald Reagan, and have picked up on narrative as a term again with Presidents Bush and Obama.

⁵⁵ One reason for this can be ascribed to the period of presidential history where "public speaking was deemed more appropriate for congressmen than for presidents." (Stuckey, 1991, p. 19) During the 19th century it was rarer for a president to speak publicly, and Stuckey points out that President Lincoln actually spoke less in public rather than more after he became president (Stuckey, 1991, p. 21).

he was born into an affluent family, he struck out on his own, away from his privileged upbringing. Or, in the case of President Franklin Roosevelt, he overcame a physical disability. Recently, however, these types of exterior challenges in the narratives of the candidates and presidents have also given way to narratives of interior struggles described by Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama, which reflects the growing interest in what influences the president from his private life as much as from his public life. These characteristics formed from the personal background of the candidate have become as important for people's understanding of the politician as his public figure and record.

This sense of personal struggle also relates to narratives concerned with people and the nation, because it establishes identification with the president/candidate for the audience, as well as enabling progression in the narrative through a present conflict for the protagonist. Kevin McClure's approach to narrative in the article "Resurrecting the Narrative Paradigm: Identification and the Case of Young Earth Creationism." (2009) is relevant to consider here again, since presidents speak into a long tradition surrounding the presidency. In this way they adhere to the well-known narratives surrounding the White House, but they also formulate new interpretations of these narratives through their own personal background and their personal political agenda. In this sense they change the national narrative of the office and of the American people. For this reason it is important and relevant to speak of each of the presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation separately, as well as the more personal narrative themes that each president introduces via his use of narrative rhetoric.

The use of narratives matter within presidential rhetoric because they are an aid in creating coherence and consistency over time, not only in messages, but in the character of the presidency, the president, and of the people that constitute the intended audience of the speeches. Therefore the use of narratives can be seen as part of the political tool kit that the president uses when communicating publicly. The focus in this dissertation, when considering the different narrative themes, will be on both the use of personal narratives for the president – his background story and the establishment of a presidential persona – and also the national narrative that the president elicits in his speeches: the vision he presents of the nation's people of its past, present, and future.

The Development of the Character and Personal Background Story of the Presidential Candidates

Presidential narrative themes especially in connection with the description of leadership also have a simplifying aspect, where responsibility of governing the nation is placed with one person.

In the media the president for instance is often described as the leader of the political system in the United States, and the most powerful man in the world. Yet this role of leadership is also seen as a construct where the president has played up his role through the use of heroic and audacious narratives of, e.g., self, people, and nation. It is therefore important for the president to establish a *believable* identity for both himself as president, as well as the people he has been elected to represent.

Historically, one of the initial considerations of the formation of the presidency was how to find the right person for the position. The ideal candidate was seen as being the person who was the most virtuous among his peers. The goal was to find a person who possessed moderation in his view of leadership, (Schwartz, 1986, pp. 206-207) and did not want the power for its own sake, or to be pronounced King. A ‘disinterested’ leader was seen as a better leader of the executive branch, rather than an independent and active leader. The essence of this view was that the president could not want the power he possessed once in office. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the notion was that the president should be able to stay above the political fray of congress. The electoral system for the position of the presidency was even set up initially, so that the ‘common people’ merely had to identify the most virtuous in their own community. Then this person, it was thought, would be able to identify the most virtuous candidate nation-wide through the Electoral College. Furthermore, to campaign initially for the presidency was almost seen as proof that you were not fit to run (since it was not virtuous to display such an interest in power). The presidency or the campaign for it instead had to seek the candidate. Representatives of the people, for instance, *went* to George Washington and asked him to become the first president, rather than Washington coming to them. Washington’s own approach to the office of the presidency also had an influence on the traditions and views of the presidency, since the former general was hesitant to assume office to begin with. “The genuine reticence that George Washington demonstrated toward becoming president became an expected aspect of candidacy throughout the nineteenth century, as ambitious men averred their humble willingness to accept the great station being offered by a too generous party convention.” (Cornog, 2004, p. 61)

The change to this emphasis on virtue in the election process and in the election of candidates for the presidency already came in the 1800 election between Jefferson and Adams (Boller, 2004, pp. 11-13), which became a contest between virtue and vice. The adversaries described each other not merely as possessing competing views of government but as posing existential threats to the union’s existence (Zarefsky, 2013). This can be seen as somewhat

contradictory with Jefferson's later post-election proclamation in his inaugural address that the political parties only had different opinions and still shared fundamental principles on the nation.

The shift in the virtuous view of the character of the president continued in the early 19th century. For President Washington, a "Humble birth, in his time, was not a political plus. An entire bookshelf of political theory pronounced that wealth and social standing were necessary qualifications for political office, because only a person from such a background would have the necessary independence of fortune and mind to resist corrupting influences." (Cornog, 2004, p. 32) This ideal background of a candidate for the presidency changed with the increase in the number of people allowed to vote in general elections and the democratizing of the election process, with a presidential candidate such as Andrew Jackson demanding more attention to the popular vote in relation to the Electoral College. This also changed presidential communication, which "... was no longer restricted to a relatively small group of homogenous elites." (Stuckey, 1991, p. 4) President Jackson was the first successful candidate to benefit from a 'not-so-fortunate-son' background. With President Jackson the focus was placed on the candidate's personal struggle to reach the stage in life where he could be considered a suitable candidate for the presidency. President Jackson himself, in particular, helped further this view of the president's character, and thereby aided the shift from the 'removed' ideal of the president as leader. Alexis de Tocqueville commented on this change in the descriptions of the background of American politicians in the first volume of his book *Democracy in America* from 1835: "In our day one can say that in the United States the wealthy classes of society are almost entirely out of political affairs and that wealth, far from being a right [to power], is a real cause of disfavor and an obstacle to coming to power." (Tocqueville, 2000 ed., p. 171) The 1824 election represented this change clearly with Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams as candidates. Where Adams was the son of a former president and seen as part of the privileged class, Jackson was a war time hero and a man of the people. Their paring has later been juxtaposed as "Davy Crockett vs. a Gentleman Dandy". President Adams won out initially, but lost the following election in 1828 to Andrew Jackson.

While President Jackson's appeals to the public were a rarity during his time, the humble origins became such an important part of a candidate's background that there are examples of clearly manufactured origin stories, such as William Henry Harrison's campaign in 1840, which emphasized a childhood in a log cabin, rather than the actual life Harrison had lived on a plantation in Virginia (Cornog, 2004, p. 35). This description of President Harrison's personal past helped him win the election and was another example of the rise of the ideal of the president as a self-made

man, or the ‘uncommon-common-man’ as the presidential persona has also been described as. President Lincoln in the 1860 election in some ways embodied both of the character strains described here, “part Cicero, part Crockett” (RSA Summer Institute, 2013). Abraham Lincoln could both embody the image of the self-made frontiersman as well as the learned orator⁵⁶. This duality in Abraham Lincoln’s character also created a prolonged debate after the President’s death on which of the Lincolns was the real one. What had been most important about the president’s character: his commonness or his extraordinariness? Following the Civil War, military experience became an even more pronounced and useful asset in the presidential candidates’ personal background stories. Character ideals are in this way both established through tradition, where George Washington was the first ‘president general’, and also by circumstances, with the Civil War influencing the lives of all Americans, and remaining a fixed, present, and defining event in their memory of the nation’s history for many decades after: “Every Republican president from the 1868 election to the end of the century had served in the Grand Army of the Republic.” (Cornog, 2004, p. 53) The war hero image was also used by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy in their campaigns following WW II. The Vietnam War in some ways lessened the beneficial use of military service for candidates for the White House, yet even as late as the elections of 2004 and 2008, the military experience of the candidates were used as part of the character portrayal of the candidates and their ability to function as commander-in-chief, and until his exit from the Bush Administration in 2004, General Colin Powell was seen by many as a future potential candidate for the presidency.

A more recent development in the character of the presidency is the increased interest in the private, domestic life of the president, as mentioned earlier. This development can be seen as caused by both the media and the presidential campaigns themselves. For the media the shift towards covering the presidency in more personal ways occurred through distrust in the people holding the office of the presidency, which removed the respect for the president’s privacy: “The rules about coverage of a politician’s private life began to shift in the aftermath of Watergate. That scandal, along with the long history of government deception during the Vietnam War, degraded the substantial trust between the press and government that had existed in the days of FDR and Ike. Once that trust was violated, everything was fair game.” (Cornog, 2004, p. 107) It is difficult to imagine a candidate or president with the health problems similar to Presidents John F. Kennedy, Woodrow Wilson or Franklin Roosevelt being left alone by the press today.

⁵⁶ There is a campaign image of Abraham Lincoln where he stands above a split log with a book lying next to it, combining the rail splitter image of his youth with the bookish interest and his ability to teach himself to read.

The presidential campaigns, however, have also adapted to this new emphasis on their private lives. Richard Nixon's *Checkers speech* was seen as a risk in 1952, and criticized by some as mixing politics with soap opera, due to the speech's personal and emotional content⁵⁷. Forty years later Bill Clinton's *A Man from Hope* convention video could not be accused of holding back on personal revelations of the candidate's personal past, nor toning down the emotional appeal. Yet by this time the personal angle on the candidate was seen as a necessity to illustrate President Clinton's humble beginnings, in spite of his educational background from prestigious Universities, and his formidable abilities as a public speaker.

It has become just as important for the presidential candidate to present himself as a person with an *internal* psychological struggle as much as an outer struggle in his life. The reason for this shift is to show the public the depth of the candidate's character development. In the 1992 campaign cycle, President Bill Clinton had his poor background and upbringing, with a problematic relationship to a stepfather. In the 2000 election, President George W. Bush had his struggle with alcoholism and redemption through Christianity as a part of his personal narrative. And in the 2008 election, President Barack Obama focused on his mixed racial identity and determination to find a balance between his diverse cultural backgrounds. All three of the last presidents in office have laid bare problems of a personal past to show how they have overcome these challenges. Yet these problems have been as much a question of mental anguish as of financial or physical woes or surviving military conflict.

When events from one's personal life are what end up defining one's public life as well, a clear definition of a narrative of self becomes even more important. But although the interest in the personal lives of the presidents seems to have increased, as well as the use of the president's wife and family as political symbols, it can be discussed whether this is a good development for the public's view of politics. The identity of the presidency is linked to the individual president occupying the office. Yet the identity is also set apart because of the presidency's immense symbolism of institutional tradition and power compared to the human fallacy of the individual person in office. The fall of President Nixon not only had an impact on the image of the man, but also on the identity of the presidency. In some ways the president's character has become a benchmark for where the United States finds itself. The Head of State can become an illustration of

⁵⁷ The Checkers speech gets its name from the Nixon family's dog Checkers, which was made part of the speech's punchline. Richard Nixon gave the speech to counter accusations of misuse of political funds for private purposes. He delivered a half-hour address on Television, where he defended himself by among other things discussing his wife's wardrobe and one gift he did intend to keep, no matter what the voters thought: the black-and-white dog Checkers.

the change the United States as a nation is going through, with Presidents Kennedy and Reagan as previous examples of clear shifts from one identity to another. President Obama can be seen as a similar contemporary shift.

The Identity of the People and the Nation

Another important discussion on the role of rhetoric of the presidency and the use of narratives is the creation of the people, and for what the president uses the rhetorical construction of the people. How is 'the people' described and used as a symbol by the president, in relation to who he is as a politician and to the image of the nation he wants to establish? This is an important aspect of narrative rhetoric, because the audience is often given the role of protagonist in the narratives being told by the president, through an invocation of a collective "we, the people". The people described, then, have to be considered through the context of the audience to the speech. The people are constantly being iterated as a "rhetorical construct" (Beasley, 2004), yet traditions of this description also exist in, for instance, the expectations of what is going to be said in a State of the Union speech and the Inaugural address. In these speech genres the tradition of the presidency of speaking directly to the people is used to establish the bond and the *right* to speak for the people.

A key balance for the image of the presidency today is between the aforementioned empathy on the one side and the traditions of the office on the other. This is also reflected in the image of the people. The president has to show with his use of narratives that he has an intimacy with, and an understanding of the people, while maintaining the respectful position of the presidential institution, which is the background that has established the president's position as a speaker in the first place. The president needs to understand the people while maintaining his presidential voice as well.

In getting the people to consider their own identity, presidents have used different denominators. For instance, President Franklin D. Roosevelt exalted the 'common man' instead of the 'self-made man' during the Great Depression. His intention was to lift up the whole of the population – and make the people a '*nation* of self-made men'. President Eisenhower dropped the use of the common man, since it was too closely associated with communism. In recent time, President Barack Obama described himself as a common man to an increasing degree in 2012 compared to the 2008 campaign, to emphasize the difference between himself and his 2012 opponent Governor Mitt Romney. Where President Barack Obama in 2008 was the embodiment of the American Dream and potential for progress, he in 2012 was the embodiment of the middle class

experience instead and had barely paid off his student loans before entering public office at a national level.

Another important consideration in the description of the American people has been that of “American exceptionalism”. In a chapter in the book *The Rhetoric of Heroic Expectations* (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014) Professor David Zarefsky uses different historic references to describe how exceptionalism has been an essential part of the United States understanding of itself in light of historic events: Through the promise of John Winthrop’s 1630 *City upon a hill* sermon to the victory of the Revolutionary War over the Louisiana Purchase to Abraham Lincoln’s triumph in the Civil war and so on. All these events in the history of the United States have been interpreted as confirming the unique status of the nation and the claim of “American exceptionalism”. However, Zarefsky points out an important shift in the understanding of exceptionalism: “...the statement that Americans are God’s chosen became not the *conclusion* of a conditional argument aiming to motivate us, but the *premise* of a pragmatic argument aiming to license us.” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 111) Rather than the United States having to prove themselves worthy, the nation’s actions were legitimized because of the sacred identity it had been given. This view was then used as an argument for the foreign policy doctrines of presidents as well as the annexations of territories by the United States during the 19th century, as described by the “manifest destiny” term. Wars were justified through moral terms, and setbacks were seen as tests of resolve for the American people.

The danger with this view is that the president becomes too far removed in his rhetoric from politics and moves into the realm of morals completely, which many scholars have argued President George W. Bush did during his presidency. Zarefsky references a valuable term concerning this issue, “a cosmic frame”, which is borrowed from Kenneth Burke: “As Burke notes, though, a cosmic frame tends to be stretched until it finally cracks. It no longer can encompass everything – reality undermines its premises- and it collapses of its own weight.” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 115) Zarefsky for instance sees American exceptionalism as a cosmic frame that began to crack under George W. Bush. John Murphy presents a similar argument in the article “Our Mission and Our Moment: George W. Bush and September 11th” (2003), where he describes the risks of relying on epideictic speech as argument for too long a period. When we consider the proposed term of a narrative arc for broader narratives, it can resemble that of the cosmic frame, in the establishment of a world view for the audience.

The Increased Role of Epideictic Speech for Presidents

As argued earlier in this dissertation, the use of narratives is more clearly present in the epideictic elements of presidential speeches. Therefore it is relevant to point out that scholars argue that an increase in ceremonial presidential speeches has taken place since the 1970s, from President Gerald Ford and onwards (Guillaume, 2013), which in turn can be said to have increased the use of narratives for presidents in their speeches. One reason for the increase in ceremonial speeches has been attributed to the need for a restoration of confidence in the presidency post-Watergate and U.S. engagement in the Vietnam War (Guillaume, 2013). The rise of epideictic speech could therefore be seen both as a short-term response to a crisis in the identity of the presidency, but it could also, according to French researcher Luc Benoit á la Guillaume, be seen as a systematic change, since the use of epideictic speech has not abated post crisis. Events and ceremonies that previously did not have presidential speeches attached to them now do, and minor speech genres such as Memorial Day speeches have developed⁵⁸.

For rhetorical scholar Milene Ortega the role of epideictic speeches has also become an important part of presidential rhetoric to study in greater detail. In *The “Borders” of Presidential Epideictic Rhetoric* (Ortega, 2014), Ortega argued that in general the values in the epideictic speeches of a president are used to enforce a political persona of the speaker. The borders of epideictic rhetoric have therefore changed due to the rhetorical presidency, where there has been an increased focus on presidential leadership. What can be questioned now, according to Ortega, is what kind of strategies the presidents use to formulate identities of their leadership and identities for the audience combined with a political agenda in epideictic speeches.

A critique of the increased role of the use of epideictic speech by presidents is presented by Mary Stuckey: “Something valuable has been lost in making this shift. In deemphasizing the president’s deliberative role in favor of the ceremonial role, our notions of community, of what it means to be a member of a polity, have been eroded, and cheapened, have become less authentic because our beliefs are increasingly divorced from our practices... As presidential interpretations have shifted from the long argumentative and premise-laden discourses of earlier years to the visually privileged assertive discourse that characterizes modern televised communication, the American polity is promoted to lose sight of its origins, its philosophical grounding, and its self-understanding.” (Stuckey, 1991, p. 3) Yet I would argue, as we shall see in

⁵⁸ Initially, the day was focused on the Civil War, then included WW I, and now focuses on all wars. Until the 1960s, presidents spoke only occasionally on this day, since the 1960s there has been an increase, and from 1992 and onwards the president gives a speech every year on Memorial Day. (Guillaume, 2013).

the forthcoming case studies, that President Obama in his use of narratives does attempt to move beyond simple image-laden explanations, and in different cases invites and asks the audience to *engage* in more complicated issues, rather than *presenting* them with simple solutions, which Stuckey states as a problem with the increased use of epideictic speech.

Epideictic speeches seem well-suited for an increasingly personal presidency, since the speeches enable the president to address the audience more personally and with a greater emphasis on values rather than focusing on strictly political issues. Presidents are expected to speak more and more in this way at ceremonies, yet the danger is also present for the presidency in the misuse or overuse of epideictic speeches. It can lead to a potential distrust in the institution, with either a lack of real political content to balance out the valued statements or through too much editing of a specific event or of history within a given speech or a series of speeches. If the latter occurs it can easily fuel the critique of political storytelling, as described by Salmon. An epideictic response to a crisis can also prove disastrous politically, such as when President George W. Bush failed to address the damages of Hurricane Katrina with a fitting response, and subsequently saw his approval ratings begin to drop significantly.

The different developments for the presidency in terms of the changing media landscapes, increased political influence, crisis management, new speaker expectations, and the focus on a more empathetic and authentic identity of the president in office are all incorporated into the more institutional aspects of the traditions of the presidency, creating a more ceremonial and personal presidency. In this way a balance between tradition and change is often sought in presidential rhetoric to meet the ‘expectation gap’ that an incoming president meets with once in office.

In the following section of the chapter, the scholarship on two presidents’ approaches to these different subjects will be discussed from a narrative perspective. There will be a particular emphasis on the presidents’ foci on establishing an image of both the people and the presidency.

Presidential Narrative Themes of President Ronald Reagan

While examples of earlier presidents’ use of narrative rhetoric has been presented, the president who has been associated the most with both an outspoken hero-image of the presidency and the use of narratives as part of presidential rhetoric is still President Ronald Reagan. It therefore does not seem a coincidence that Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm and narrative as a term in rhetorical theory and practice were debated during President Reagan’s years in office. The narrative paradigm was discussed in detail from 1982-1989, and there were a number of articles dealing with

President Ronald Reagan as a storyteller in the White House (Fisher, 1982; 1989; Lewis, 1987; Stuckey, 1991). President Reagan is often called “the great communicator”, “... and was proclaimed by Carville and Begala to be “the greatest storyteller to grace the White House in the last fifty years.” ” (Salmon, 2010, p. 88) Reagan, however, was also described by contemporary critics as staying in his role as B-movie actor, and simply performing the role of the president. The duality of Presidential Reagan’s colorful ability as a public speaker also represented a greater focus on image through aesthetics. This was not only in the case of his campaign ads, but also in his rhetoric, where his focus was on strengthening the image of the presidency following the crisis of the Watergate Scandal and the Vietnam War. President Reagan did this through an emphasis on heroes, both the ones found in the office of the presidency and on the ones working in ordinary jobs across the United States. President Reagan spoke of “A morning in America again”, and often referenced the life on his ranch to connect himself to the cowboy role he had played on film. These different personal narrative themes led to a specific identity of his presidency, which was closely tied to the person of Ronald Reagan, yet it also connected the traditions of the presidency to that of the law man on the frontier.

Walter Fisher himself used President Ronald Reagan to discuss rhetorical narratives in several publications (Fisher, 1982; 1984; 1989). Fisher’s intention in one article was to look at the paradox that President Reagan was seen as a good communicator in spite of often being incorrect in his statements. Fisher believed President Reagan was able to counter these communicative mistakes because he drew on romantic notions of heroism. President Reagan referenced previous heroic presidents when describing his own role as president (Fisher, 1982). But he also used the identity of ‘the hero’ when he described the American people in their everyday lives (Lewis, 1987). Reagan makes the listener into the hero of his narratives through personal anecdotes about action, as well as defining US history as created by individuals who have struggled through adversity.

William F. Lewis has a similar approach to Reagan’s use of narratives in his article “Telling America’s Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency.” (1987) What is relevant in Lewis’ article’s exploration of narrative form is the focus it puts on “...the varieties of narrative form active in Reagan’s discourse to help explain his presidency and the reactions...” (Lewis, 1987, p. 281) Unlike the scholars working with Barack Obama’s use of narratives, as we shall see momentarily, Lewis seeks to distinguish the different uses of narrative for President Reagan. Lewis differentiated in the narratives told by President Reagan through three forms of narrative: that of the United States, its people, and President Ronald Reagan himself. These three forms of narrative

reflect the relationship we have discussed between the identity of the presidency and the identity of the people as established in the rhetoric of the president. The forms have also served as a template for the three presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation that I suggest are present in presidential rhetoric, due to the traditions and overall development of the presidency, although I have described them as themes to distinguish them from the structural discussion of President Barack Obama's use of narratives.

Another important point that Lewis makes about Ronald Reagan is the president's dual role in the narratives he tells. President Reagan functions as both a character and the teller of the story – the narrator *and* the narrated: “As a character in the story, Reagan is a mythic hero. He embodies the role of the compassionate, committed political outsider; he is the active force that has arrived to help right the prevailing wrongs and to get things moving again. As the narrator of the story, Reagan is portrayed as simply presenting the nature of the situation. There is no artifice and no threat in this style of realistic narration; Reagan-as-narrator just presents things as they are.” (Lewis, 1987, p. 285) These two roles of Ronald Reagan both place the president within the myth of America, as one of its presidential heroes, as well as allowing the president to step outside as an omnipresent narrator-in-chief and describe how things fit together.

This dual role is important to consider in our description of the role as narrator-in-chief. It is also something that rhetorical scholar John Murphy has picked up on in connection with Barack Obama's rhetoric: “By characterizing US history as an “unlikely story,” he made sense of disparate events. The American narrative cohered as a triumph of the unlikely over the probable.

Significantly, he also assumed the authority to narrate our history as a people, usually a presidential prerogative.” (Murphy, 2011, p. 398) The part of the quotation in bold is particularly interesting because it signifies that becoming *the teller* of stories is part of the goal of narration itself. The ability to fill out the speaker position as narrator-in-chief is part of the presidential identity. For a political candidate, the goal of telling narratives of self, people, and nation is not only to present the content of the themes themselves, but also to achieve the persona of a storyteller, or the ethos of the narrator, due to the historic connotations of such a presidential persona as both a father figure for the nation and a foreseer of the nation's future.

Mary Stuckey is another scholar writing on President Reagan's use of narratives. While acknowledging the effectiveness of using storytelling to create identification with one's message and make it stick in the memory of the audience, Stuckey critiques President Reagan's use of narratives in a way that differs from Fisher's view of President Reagan's narratives. The main

problem in President Reagan's narratives, according to Stuckey, was in his use of heroic people in the audience and President Reagan's references to them through anecdotes of their deeds. In this way President Reagan unlike some of his predecessors lowered the need of engagement of the audience in the tale he was telling according to Stuckey. Another side to this lack of engagement is the lack of an actual quest or action for the audience to engage in, rather the audience already has what it takes to be their own heroes in Reagan's stories. (Stuckey, 1991, p. 118)

In the above articles, President Reagan is seen as primarily successful in his use of narratives, since they have helped him strengthen his presidency and deflect criticism. Yet President Reagan's use of narratives also served as a lesson to what can go wrong when communicating in this way from the oval office. The emphasis on establishing heroes in his narratives for instance, also had peculiar historical consequences for President Reagan. For instance, he described the Afghan Mujahideen fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s as noble freedom fighters similar to the founding fathers of the United States. The increased focus on the hero image, which President Reagan's narratives brought with it, also had its negative consequences for the presidency in general and the expectations of what the president was capable of achieving politically, as well as in some ways disengaging the audience from the issues if one follows Stuckey's argument.

Barack Obama's Narratives

When considering the point that scholars such as Stefan Iversen and Ditmar Till have made about the lack of research on the use of narratives within political rhetoric⁵⁹, it is interesting to see that following the campaigns of Barack Obama and the first period of his presidency, a number of scholarly articles *have* dealt with the appeal of Barack Obama to voters, where the emphasis has been on the use of narratives. A number of different readings of Barack Obama's rhetoric and the role of narratives therein will be presented in the following section of this chapter. Their different approaches to both Barack Obama's use of narratives, and the scholar's own use of narrative as a term in their rhetorical criticism, can help this dissertation's discussion of the use narratives within presidential rhetoric. Yet it will also be shown, why each of the articles' subject matter could benefit from a clearer and more nuanced approach to the understanding of what a narrative *is*.

⁵⁹ See the introduction chapter.

A Presidential Campaign as a Narrative

In her article “The role of narrative in political campaigning: An analysis of speeches by Barack Obama” (2010), Stephanie Hammer focuses on Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign’s overall narrative, and how the broadness of this campaign narrative helped voters identify with Barack Obama as a presidential candidate. “Barack Obama undertook the difficult task of formulating a narrative that would lead as many Americans as possible to elect him as their presidential candidate for the Democratic Party because they believed his story to be an authentic expression of his own biography, but also a reflection of their own experiences.” (Hammer, 2010, p. 285) This relates to both the concept of consubstantiality from Kenneth Burke as well as the ideas of Walter Fisher, particularly the term “narrative fidelity”, which described the relationship between life experiences of the narrator and of the audience. There is also a relation to McClure’s emphasis on narrative identification in the “reflection” voters had of their own experiences in Barack Obama’s life story.

Narrative as a term in Hammer’s article is used to convey the level of identification of a political campaign, especially by focusing on the coherence in a narrative that was able to connect the candidate’s background with the background of the people asked to vote for him. But Hammer does not describe specifically what the narrative content of the campaign consisted of, and the term ‘narrative’ is used without distinction to describe both local personal narratives in the shape of anecdotes within singular speeches as well as more global national narratives of the entire campaign. For Hammer, narrative as a term is both seen as personal, national, and anecdotal, and there are no distinctions between the different themes or structures of this narrative. The idea of unity and one nation with one people, for instance, becomes for Hammer a “grand narrative” (p. 278). Narrative as a term shifts from being a story in the speeches themselves to a broader grand narrative, when seen across the speeches. A clearer distinction between the personal and presidential themes, as well as the local and global structures of the narratives used, would further the understanding of Barack Obama’s use of narrative rhetoric.

Hammer does at one point express a direct diversification of what a narrative does during a campaign: “A successful narrative then needs to reflect an image of the national community that is broad enough for the leader to gain a majority following, but also intimate enough to invoke a feeling of authenticity and exceptionalness in the addressed group.” (p. 287) The community has to be drawn in, but needs to feel a sense of authenticity with the narrative of the candidate, so two narrative themes have to cohere to create the identity of a national community of people and the identity of the candidate. Hammer further describes these two purposes of narrative via Rogers M. Smith’s book *Stories of Peoplehood* (2003): “First present a story of peoplehood with which the

addressed can identify; and second, present yourself as a member and leader of that group. Only then will your narrative be successful. The second condition, especially, depends on the introduction of your personal story as an example, but also in order to function as a model.” (Hammer, 2010, p. 284) These two narrative purposes resemble the narrative forms considered during the Reagan presidency, as well as the three story levels ‘you’, ‘us’, and ‘now’ of Marshall Ganz. Yet Smith presents his stories in opposite priority of Ganz, where establishing the community comes first, then the presentation of the candidate. Hammer, however, again does not distinguish between the two narratives (community and candidate) in her own analysis, thereby losing the nuances between narrative themes that describe the candidate and the people. The narrative themes of self and people are essentially tied together during the campaign. Yet by initially treating the themes separately, in the identification of their content and structures, their presence and purpose in the speeches become clearer to the reader and practitioner alike.

Narrative as a Method to Establish Referential Structures between the Past and the Present

In the article “Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation,” (2011) rhetorical scholar John Murphy focuses on describing Barack Obama’s rhetorical connection with the Civil Rights Movement in the 2008 campaign. Murphy views this connection through a biblical framework, where Barack Obama’s call to action for his audience is often referred to in terms of a narrative. Barack Obama’s own generation becomes a “Joshua generation” stepping in after the Moses generation represented by Martin Luther King and the surviving persons that fought for civil rights in the 1950s and -60s. By focusing in on a particular historic theme and the linkage between historic events, Murphy’s use of narrative as a term serves a more distinct purpose and identification than Hammer’s broad approach to narrative did.

Barack Obama constitutes his audience as “...responsible, moral agents in a living narrative” (Murphy, 2011, p. 405) by giving the people the role of protagonists to play in the ongoing story. He combines this with a “...culturally dominant mission narrative [in the US] with the critical capacity offered by the black church.” (p. 405) Narrative is here used to describe the ability to reach back to a point in history that makes sense to pick up from with a new chapter set in the present moment. President Barack Obama establishes this referential link to the past through his personal background, and offers not a finished narrative but an unresolved one, as suggested by Lucaites and Condit in their analysis of narratives in rhetorical discourse and advertised as

important in modern presidential rhetoric by Stuckey. (Stuckey, 1991, p. 118) This allows the audience to create a parallel historic plot for them to partake in.

Momentum through the Journey Metaphor

What can be drawn more distinctly from Murphy's article for the purpose of describing the reasons for using narrative rhetoric as a president or candidate for the presidency is the emphasis on the metaphor of the journey. The journey relates both to a fundamental structure within storytelling, which scholars such as Joseph Campbell have pointed out (Campbell, 1993), as well as a more specific narrative related to the United States. The relationship between the frontier and the wilderness beyond it is an often referenced setting of perpetual struggle in stories regarding the historic past of the United States. The country's national identity has often been seen as created in precisely this borderland, not fully developed, yet with the potential and mission of bringing order to the wilderness. The "frontier thesis" of the 19th century was one manifestation of this. Later incarnations have appeared in the shape of President Kennedy's "New Frontier", and President George W. Bush's frontier allusions after the 9/11 attack (Faludi, 2007, pp. 5-6). That President Bush was able to transfer the frontier setting to a global arena, where the United States as a whole was the homestead, and the international terrorists were the attacking savages, was due to the fact that, as Murphy points out, the Wilderness as a place functions as both an outer and inner arena of challenge: "The Wilderness is outside of us, in the troubles of our times, but also inside of us, in our sins as a people." (Murphy, 2011, p. 399) This also allows Barack Obama to speak of a wilderness without having to create a 'new frontier' as President Kennedy did. Instead Barack Obama's wilderness is a moral one where he, as others have done before him, refers to an inner struggle for an American national identity. This moral version of the wilderness has become more commonplace as a reference post Water Gate and Vietnam, where again the words of the presidency reflects the United States' conversation with itself on issues of national identity. The inner wilderness also relates to the internalization of the personal conflicts facing presidential candidates in their narratives of self: the search for a valid moral compass in their own lives can be expanded to serve the purpose of leading the nation back on the right path as well. The journey metaphor therefore also relates to a more specific mission of the United States, where the wilderness was placed as a challenge for the people of the United States to traverse (Beasley, 2004, pp. 30-32). Barack Obama gives this challenge a generational aspect, where progress is not seen as an individual achievement, but found through political movements and organizations.

In Barack Obama's narrative of the people, Americans are constituted as a "... pilgrim people making the first faltering" steps toward a new birth of freedom in a Promised Land." (Murphy, 2011, p. 388) Barack Obama in this way makes the American people and himself a part of history, by creating a covenant with the people and renewing its promise. "By the logic of type and antitype, as Joshua succeeded Moses, a new people supplanted those who had wandered the wilderness." (Murphy, 2011, p. 397) People are transformed through the journey narrative, much in the same way as the individual hero is transformed by his personal journey or quest (Campbell, 1993 ed., p. 193). This appeal of Barack Obama's use of narratives and the journey metaphor helps Murphy situate his argument that the narrative was a center piece of the 2008 campaign's rhetoric. Murphy is also able to use the journey metaphor for the next step of his argument, that the journey was tied to the exodus narrative of the Civil Rights Movement which Barack Obama presented the new chapter of and established a historic parallel to in 2008.

The Civil Rights Movement as a Specific Narrative

The specific historical connection to the Civil Rights Movement creates the momentum of Barack Obama's national narrative in the campaign (something that Hammer also picked up on in her article and which journalist David Remnick writes about in his biography *The Bridge* (2010) about Obama). "Joshua commanded armies, settled disputes, allocated resources – he governed a nation. Beyond that, Joshua led his people into the Promised Land. This neglected element of the Exodus offered the potential to re-imagine the Civil Rights Movement. It had been left on that mountaintop in 1968, both in popular imagination and in Obama's rhetoric, primarily because no one could see oppression as horrific as slavery or segregation nor imagine a new Moses in light of King's performance. Obama crafted the way to the next stage... It made narrative sense... It also made political sense." (Murphy, 2011, pp. 402-403) Murphy's description of Barack Obama's linkage between his 2008 campaign and the Civil Rights Movement helps explain the strength of a narrative structure, as well as a consistent theme.

For a politician, finding the next chapter of a pre-existing movement or a national narrative becomes a way to strengthen the national narrative of the present campaign. A well-known starting point can clue in the audience quicker and more precisely than a narrative beginning from scratch. If the narrative arc between the past and the present is presented convincingly, the coherence of the narrative is strengthened significantly because it stretches further back than simply to the beginning of the political campaign or the political life of the candidate. Instead the narrative is rooted in an

actual past with events molded in the national conversation over time. What the Obama campaign of 2008 did so well was to find the link (and thereby coherence across a broad narrative arc) to the moment in the past where a strong movement or issue or idea came to a halt. The campaign and Barack Obama then had the ability and credibility to ‘collapse’ history between that moment and the present in a way that made coherent sense and created a larger narrative arc through history, which people could relate to in the present where Barack Obama’s speeches were given.

Narrative as a Window into the Self of the Candidate

Stephanie Hammer’s article focused on how Barack Obama reached out to voters in his 2008 campaign through a broad and appealing narrative. John Murphy presented a more specific look at one personal narrative theme of the 2008 Obama campaign in the shape of a biblically themed journey through U.S history. Phillip Hammack’s article ”The Political Psychology of Personal Narrative: The Case of Barack Obama,” (2010) focuses on how to understand the candidate himself through narratives based on his personal life. Hammack suggests that the appeal of Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign could be found in the narrative of the candidate’s own life and its connections with the narrative of other Americans’ personal life. This resembles Hammer’s point, yet where Hammer focused on the people receiving the narrative and what it meant for them, Hammack points the analytical lens the other way, and goes into the meaning of Barack Obama’s life as it relates to Barack Obama as a political speaker.

Hammack’s article emphasizes the psychological aspect of the use of narratives, and describes more clearly the appeal of a personal narrative than the other descriptions we have discussed so far. Through Barack Obama’s memoir, Hammack defines what he calls a “narrative identity” as guided by narrative psychology theory. According to Hammack, Barack Obama’s personal narrative theme in the memoir is to find a balance between his different heritages: “A major theme of his story centers on his quest to discover an anchor for his identity in some community of shared practice.” (Hammack, 2010, p.182) With this personal struggle to fit in, Barack Obama however, is also able to describe larger identity issues of the communities that he tries to understand and become part of at different stages of his life. Through the understanding of the communal narratives in these groups, Barack Obama is able to better understand his own personal narrative. Readers of the memoir are invited to gain a similar shared narrative experience with Barack Obama, and through Barack Obama’s experiences achieve an insight into their own lives as well. “Narratives, however, do not exist solely at the individual psychological level. Groups

construct “master” narratives that provide their members with the necessary *discourse* to understand collective experience... Collective and individual narratives provide tools that are used as discursive resources in human development ... and as resources for community empowerment.” (Hammack, 2010, p. 184) Here Hammack suggests, in parallel to the thinking of Hayden White on stories as social centers, that there is a connection between individual and collective narratives. A person in this view can relate his own personal narrative to the larger narratives that he sees in his community. For Hammack, Barack Obama is a good case study for this combination of personal and national narratives since: “Barack Obama embodies, in his own autobiography, larger social and political conversations that are deeply relevant to the 21st-century world order, such as cultural inclusion and the recognition of identity diversity.” (p. 188)

That Barack Obama finds this balance between: 1) his different identities 2) between societies’ different problems 3) and between the present and his personal past, leaves him, according to the approach of narrative psychology, with a narrative of inclusion and integration rather than “divided loyalties”: “... his story suggests a strong need to integrate the sets of commitments specified by his multiple identities into a workable whole.” (p. 200) The memoir’s theme of working through Barack Obama’s split identity between cultures is actually what enables Barack Obama to find a way (and personal need) to integrate these different identities. This creates his political identity, as well as his faith in other people as a solution to his questions of identity: “... the beneficence of other people that liberates Obama from the solitude of his youth that allows him to embrace the benefit, rather than solely the burden of a double (or multiple) consciousness.” (p. 200) In his narrative of self, Barack Obama embodies the need to find links between different viewpoints or cultures: “In order to construct a coherent identity, Obama has had to engage in multiple conversations across continents, beyond the potential divides of human communities. But in engaging in these conversations, he comes to transcend these divisions as he recognizes the fundamental reliance on others for self-understanding and well-being.” (p. 201)

The red thread in the articles on President Obama’s use of narratives is the question of how and why voters were able to identify with Barack Obama, either via a broad sense of national purpose, a specific cause, such as the Civil Rights Movement, or by the emphasis on Barack Obama’s personal experiences that were linked to people’s own lives. This resembles the questions that drove the articles written on Ronald Reagan, which also sought to describe the appeal of that president’s use of narratives. Yet, while the more recent articles on candidate Barack Obama and his use of narratives differ amongst themselves in their focus and description of narrative as a term,

there was a greater similarity between the articles on President Reagan. These articles focused on distinguishing the different forms of narratives President Reagan used, or their varying themes. The ‘Reagan articles’ presented a more detailed approach to the study of the structures and content of narrative rhetoric, and the attempts to create distinctions between different narrative themes and their content, a distinction that is not as clearly stated in the articles on Barack Obama’s use of narratives.

Conclusion

The tension between idealized vision making and more reality grounded explanations lies at the heart of the identity of the presidency and the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric. The use of narratives is an editing process of characters and events, and although it may be truthful in its thematic purpose, there will always be gaps to be exploited and described as unfaithful to reality. Rhetorical scholars studying presidential use of narrative rhetoric must be aware of this tension. Presidential speakers themselves also need to consider the risks of the use of narratives, or else they may either overemphasize aspects of their image, creating great expectations that cannot be fulfilled, or allow opponents to distort the image of their candidacy for the presidency.

The influence of media in particular has had an impact on presidential rhetoric. This has led to a more central role for the president in the political system and in the minds of the Americans as a representative of this system. The increase in the number of presidential speeches in general and in speeches with epideictic content in particular has been criticized by scholars (Hart, 1987; Stuckey, 1991; Guillaume, 2013). Yet when such content is used objectively, or with an acknowledgement of its subjective qualities, the speeches of a president can also lead to educational benefits for the national conversation.

The balance between the individual and the institution of the presidency has moved towards the individual. While President Truman believed that the cheering crowds, he met when he gave his public speeches, were there because of the presidency and not him (Stuckey, 1991, p. 47), it seems hard to ignore the power of personality with a candidate such as Barack Obama and candidates before him. This personalization of the presidency is also reflected in the development in the use of narratives. They have become more personalized in terms of a focus on qualities associated with the president’s private life, as well as focusing on inner conflicts as much as outer conflicts. In terms of the presidency itself, identification is also a question of balance: “The modern presidency requires the burdensome balancing act of simultaneously maintaining the gap between

the ethos of the presidency and the citizens, and shrinking it in ways that help Americans identify with not just the person in the office but with the institution of the office itself.” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 54) The balancing act also informs this dissertation’s focus on both what is described as traditional narrative themes of the presidency, and the more personal narrative themes introduced by individual candidates.

Essentially, the traditions of the White House can be seen as both a benefit and a burden for the speaker. Finding a way to facilitate and interpret the history of the United States and the inhabitants of the White House can create a strong argument for why the speaker should become the next interpreter of this history. Yet this history also needs to be placed in the context of both the individual president and the context of the contemporary time of the given presidency. This is what narratives represent in presidential rhetoric. Through their content in the shape of the traditional themes, and in their forms that allow for the conflation of history into the present moment, narratives are used to interpret history, constitute the people, and establish an ethos as national narrator for the presidential candidate and president in residence.

Chapter 4. A Moveable Past: Barack Obama's Narrative of Self

For a presidential candidate, a narrative of a personal past has become an essential part of a campaign's message. Historian Evan Cornog writes in *The Power and the Story* (2004) that this has been the case for a long time⁶⁰, which we also saw with the examples in the previous chapter on presidential rhetoric and the use of narratives. It is not only what the presidential candidate says and does in the moment of the campaign that he is measured by, but also how these messages resonate back through his past and coheres with the candidate's previous engagements and the major turning points in the candidate's life. The candidate's personal past is a subject the candidate can speak of with both authenticity and authority. Through the narrative of the personal past the candidate can therefore establish his ethos as a speaker, or the persona which he wishes to convey to his audience. If the narrative of the self is established in a way that both seems coherent with the person of the present and enables the audience to identify the events of the narrative with their own life experiences (as described by Fisher's concept of narrative fidelity), this helps the audience accept the candidate's persona and through him the overall message of the campaign. The narrative of self in this way is also a way to solidify the position as a narrator of other narratives for the candidate, enabling him to speak of the narratives of people and nation. For these different reasons, the memoir *Dreams from My Father* (1995) by President Barack Obama is the initial focus of this chapter on the narrative of the self.

The way President Obama narrates his own past through the use of characters, settings, and events in the memoir becomes a valuable starting point for better understanding him as both a speaker and narrator. This chapter, however, deals not only with President Obama's narration of his personal past in the memoir. The content of the memoir is also compared with speeches from what has been described as the 'early Obama' period (Till, 2013). During this period Barack Obama's narrative of self was translated from the pages of the memoir to his public speeches, beginning with the 2004 DNC speech and continuing throughout the presidential campaign of 2007-2008. By examining significant speeches from the 2008 presidential campaign, it will be shown and discussed how Barack Obama chose specific settings, characters, and events from the memoir to emphasize during the 2008 election.

⁶⁰ Cornog, for instance, describes how the personal background story has been important for presidents before Barack Obama. Cornog uses examples of the esteemed character of George Washington, and in particular more populist presidents such as Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt to discuss how their personal stories played a significant role in shaping the public's image of them. (Cornog, 2004 pp. 51-66)

The differences in these texts will help exemplify the challenges inherent in presenting a truthful and coherent narrative of the self that cannot be contested in public. With this approach the goal of the chapter is to show the appeal for a political candidate of a narrative of self, presented in detail. Yet the very appeal of Barack Obama's personal themes found in his narrative of self has also been used against him subsequently, in an attempt to undermine his character.

Presidential Biographies

Since Andrew Jackson had his biography published for the 1824 and 1828 presidential elections (Cornog, 2004, pp. 18-19), presidential candidates have published different materials during their campaigns to illustrate the connection between their political ideas and experiences from their personal life. Historian Evan Cornog cites a number of examples including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Life of Franklin Pierce* in 1852, and (supposedly) Davy Crockett's 1836 biography of Martin Van Buren: *The Life of Martin Van Buren*. (Cornog, 2004, pp. 74-75) The 20th century saw an increase in the biographies of presidential hopefuls, and Cornog sums up the publications' relevance for the campaigns in this way: "These campaign tomes, and many others, have presented the candidate's own version of his life story. Each attempted to define the terms of the coming debate. Such books are both expressions of a candidate's personality and testing grounds for issues and stories that will be deployed in the coming race. However colloquial or relaxed they may sound, today's campaign autobiographies are carefully deployed weapons of electoral war." (Cornog, 2004, p. 79) The important difference to point out with these biographies, compared to Barack Obama's memoir, is that the biographies were written directly for the use in the presidential campaigns. The *Dreams from My Father* book was written earlier, before Barack Obama became a national figure. For this and other reasons the memoir of Barack Obama offers an interesting alternative to contemporary candidate's political life narratives, such as John McCain's *Faith of My Fathers* (1999) and Mitt Romney's *No apology: The Case for American Greatness* (2010).

Barack Obama's memoir was written at a time when he had not yet emerged with an established political persona on the national stage, nor had he even won his first election at the state level in Illinois. The memoir contains passages that would most likely have been edited out if the main purpose of the publication was to position Barack Obama as a viable candidate for the White

House⁶¹. The book's personal narrative themes and emphasis on an internal questioning of its protagonist's identity also differs from the determined 'outer' struggles of economic or physical proportions many presidential candidates have faced in their narrated pasts. Economic challenges are rarely at the center of Barack Obama's memoir, and when they are, the situations are used to describe larger societal problems or Barack Obama's rejection of economic security in favor of working with people in need during his professional career.

Another reason the memoir stands out and is worth analyzing more closely, when regarding Barack Obama as a speaker, is Barack Obama's open reflections on the process of narrating his own and his family's past. Most biographies in some way or other acknowledge that the publication is not the whole truth, but one person's view of the past. But for Barack Obama the retelling of the past and the dilemmas of this retelling becomes part of one of the personal narrative themes of the memoir: the acceptance of an ever changing relation to one's self and background. His musings on the relationship between history and memory even resembles the academic debate on the issue (Phillips, 2010). This conscious debate of the validity of a past recollected from the present occurs in Barack Obama's description of his father, Barack Senior, and the potential role the father, and the African heritage he represents, might play in Barack Obama's own life. Even the title of the memoir *Dreams from My Father* refers to lessons learned not directly from the father, but through the clouded territory of dreams – messages filtered through the subjective subconscious.

Barack Obama also questions the 'myths' told by his American family and the family unit's description of the shared past and the relationship to his father's brief stay in Hawaii. These more foreign events in Barack Obama's narrative of his personal past, wherein he grew up in different cultures around the world, are combined with a more down to earth portrait of his family. Barack Obama focuses on how the family as a social unit produces a shared past. In this way Barack Obama presents his personal narrative theme of a constructed past in a way that most readers can relate to in their own lives with their own family stories being told over and over again. It is this connection between the challenges of finding a common past for an ordinary family and the shaping of an 'uncommon common man' that is the link in Barack Obama's memoir between his individual experience and that of the reader. It is also the link which he later drew upon in his rhetorical

⁶¹ For instance a whole chapter is dedicated to a youthful night of intoxication and existential questions in the late hours after a college party. Other passages acknowledge that Barack Obama smoked (and inhaled) illegal substances in his youth as well as drove under the influence. While these passages may appeal to a younger electorate, the risk of including them without a redemptive conclusion or a clear moral stance in relation to them still sets Barack Obama's memoir apart from similar publications.

parallels between the narration of his own story and the narration of the United States and its identity as a nation in perpetual change.

Narrative Psychology and the Multi-Valence of Barack Obama's Narrative of Self

This parallel between Barack Obama's narrative of the self and a broader national narrative has interested a number of scholars, as we saw in the previous chapter. Perhaps the most relevant article on this issue is Phillip Hammack's article "The Political Psychology of Personal Narrative: The Case of Barack Obama" (Hammack, 2010), which was also discussed briefly in the previous chapter. Hammack takes a cognitive approach to narratives that view them as a collection of life experiences for both an individual's self-perception, and for the people trying to interpret the meaning of that specific life. With this approach Hammack seeks to clarify the later *President* Obama's political personality through a psychological profile based on the memoir *Dreams from my Father*. Although the intent of this dissertation is to discuss the narrative *method* and *themes* based on President Obama's rhetoric, Hammack's findings on Barack Obama's political psychology relates to these issues. According to Hammack, Barack Obama for instance developed a negotiation process between different identities in response to the different settings he found himself in throughout his life: "In recognizing the shifting discourses of his multiple worlds... Barack comes to appreciate the unique place he occupies in a complex social world, and he practices his skills at navigating these multiple worlds, mastering the art of pragmatic social interaction." (Hammack, 2010, p. 192) What Barack Obama draws from this negotiation with his own identity is a way to use the same skill-set in finding commonality among different groups of people. Each encounter with an audience is based on the terms of the setting he finds himself in, as much as Barack Obama's own person. Barack Obama is never himself 'entirely', but rather alternates the emphasized events in his narrative of self according to the needed frames of reference. This should be problematic for Barack Obama as a narrator, when we consider the need for a truthful and coherent narrative in political rhetoric as suggested by Fisher. Yet when considering the possibility of multivalent narratives ringing true to their audiences, as described by McClure, this can explain why Barack Obama's diverse background was not a hindrance to him in the 2008 campaign. It also brings up the relevance of considering Georgakopoulou's work on small stories, which allow the teller to establish different identities, rather than only one. Instead, the different backgrounds presented in Barack Obama's narrative of self became a source of strength, as long as he was able to adapt his narrative of self to the needed moment, audience, and setting. In this way Barack Obama's

consideration of his use of narratives can be seen as rhetorical with its inclusion of the contextual situation in the narration itself, which Phelan suggested as an important consideration for rhetorical narratives.

The main point that Hammack makes in his article on the narrative psychology of Barack Obama, is the emphasis on inclusion and “pragmatic cosmopolitanism”, which Barack Obama displays as a politician. Essentially this refers to Barack Obama’s ability to undertake multiple identities: “Through his experience in Kenya, Obama comes to appreciate the inherent multiplicity of his identity. In needing to craft a coherent narrative of his life, he constructs an identity that serves more than his own psychological needs; he writes a life story that transcends place in favor of activity. In this way, his personal narrative challenges essentialized notions of culture and identity as anchored in a concrete geography or a “patterned” sensibility.” (Hammack, 2010, p. 198) In this way Barack Obama does not end up with a firm core in his narrative of self, shaped by the key events in his life, rather Barack Obama accepts a more fluid state between cultures and communities. His identity, instead, rests on how he interacts with the given community he finds himself in, and in the actions of establishing a bridge between seemingly ‘geographically different’ people.

This ability relates to both Barack Obama’s success with a broad appealing narrative of self and of nation in the 2008 election cycle that was able to move beyond one specific community, context, or setting. It also relates to the critique of Barack Obama as a public figure without a ‘center’ in his character, which has also been presented in other biographies on the President (D’Souza, 2010). Barack Obama not only represents a “multivalent” approach to narration. His role as protagonist in the narrative of self should also be understood as multivalent⁶². In this way both the self-conscious approach in his narration as well as the personal narrative theme of fluid identities in Barack Obama’s narrative of self seems well suited for a post-modern age of perpetually shifting identities and the subsequent challenges to larger social structures, including the institution of the presidency. Through his narrative of self and its connection to a revised narrative

⁶² While the term multivalent is drawn from the work of Scott Stroud (2002), Hammack himself describes the psychological understanding of the role for Barack Obama in the memoir through the term intersectionality: “Intersectionality forces us to consider the ways in which a single individual embodies multiple identities with varying relations to a social structure of domination and subordination for some groups. Thus, we cannot reduce Obama’s identity to a story of Black racial identity development, for his male identity indexes certain forms of privilege, just as his Kenyan identity introduces distinct experiential pathways in his narrative linked to a postcolonial consciousness of power relations.” (Hammack, 2010 p. 186) Barack Obama’s identity, then, has to be seen as part of several groups, and therefore he can also be re-interpreted, and different stories can be created based on his background.

of the United States in the present moment, Barack Obama provided a relatable leadership identity in the 2008 election for the American people in a 'post'-oriented world.

Barack Obama's published Memoir(s)

Barack Obama's memoir *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* was published in 1995, just after it was announced that Barack Obama would run for a senate seat in the Illinois state legislature. It is, however, his appointment in 1990 as the first African American president of the Harvard Law Review that most often is attributed as the reason for the interest from the publishing house in the publication of the memoir. According to Barack Obama himself the book gained descent reviews and modest sales upon its first release (Obama, 2008). Yet it was only after his 2004 Democratic primary victory in the U.S. Senate race in Illinois that the memoir was re-published, and only after Barack Obama's 2004 DNC keynote speech that the book became a national best seller in a version that included the 2004 speech in the book. With that edition of the memoir, the publication itself also became regarded more clearly as part of Barack Obama's political persona as some of the reviews between 2004 and 2009 point out:

"[The memoir] may be the best-written memoir ever produced by an American politician," (Joe Klein, October 23, 2006. Time Magazine)

"[The memoir] is easily the most honest, daring, and ambitious volume put out by a major U.S. politician in the last 50 years." (Rob Woodard, November 5, 2008. The Guardian)

"[The memoir is] the most evocative, lyrical and candid autobiography written by a future president." (Michiko Kakutani, January 18, 2009. The New York Times)

With this publication history in mind, the memoir hovers between being a politically motivated publication due to its author's subsequent rise to fame or a more intimate account from a person who at the time of writing had reached a modest level of national publicity and took the opportunity to write about the fundamental issues that had shaped his life thus far⁶³.

⁶³ The version of the memoir focused on in this dissertation is a 2008 reprint of the 2004 edition, in which the 2004 DNC speech has been removed.

Dreams from My Father

The Narrative Elements in the Narrative of Self

When attempting to identify the use of narrative rhetoric in Barack Obama's memoir, we can initially consider the basic elements of a narrative described in the chapter on narrative rhetoric, and how these elements can be found in the memoir. Firstly, there are the *characters* that Barack Obama meets and the character of Barack Obama himself as the *protagonist*, as well as his role as *narrator* in the book. Secondly, there are the *settings* of the memoir that are used to reflect the narrative themes of certain periods in Barack Obama's life. The settings also establish momentum in the plot, or are used to add credibility to the narrative's authenticity. Thirdly, there are the *events* placed in a *plot* that moves the narrative in a progression towards specific conclusions. Both character and setting are part of what gives the protagonist Barack Obama new insight into his personal struggle with his identity. The narrative elements thereby give credence to the personal narrative themes of Barack Obama.

As was mentioned earlier, a purpose of looking through Barack Obama's personal past could be to establish an understanding of his psychological motivations as a politician. The purpose with this dissertation, however, is slightly different from that of the narrative psychology approach. While it is interesting to seek out the motivation for Barack Obama's policies in his own description of his personal past, the goal of this chapter is to see how Barack Obama describes the process of narration in itself in the memoir, and in this way how he approaches narration as a presidential candidate and president. How does Barack Obama argue for a narrative use of the past in the memoir? Which settings and characters does he emphasize? And how does he position himself as a narrator in the text? These issues are part of the process which would eventually allow Barack Obama to become a viable candidate for the position as narrator-in-chief in the presidential election.

The Use of Settings to Convey Narrative Themes and Characters

Any persuasive narrative needs to establish a believable world where in the story can be told. Either through memorable details, or elaborate environments the narrator is able to draw the audience in and use the setting as both a character in itself, or establish a link between setting and character to further the theme of the narrative. From William Shakespeare's use of the Castle of Elsinore as a mirror of the characters interior thoughts in *Hamlet*, to John Steinbeck's geographic depictions of California as an image of the epic nature of human destiny in *East of Eden* (1952),

settings have been used to great symbolic effect in fictional narratives. They can be put to the same use, when considering narrative form in more factual genres as well, such as the memoir.

Barack Obama is also a self-conscious user of settings, as he uses them to describe the personal narrative theme of identity in his memoir. The three major sections of the memoir are each given titles that signify settings in some ways: *Origins*, *Chicago* and *Kenya*. The *Origins* section contains quite a number of geographically diverse settings to signify Barack Obama's scattered upbringing. Settings such as Hawaii and Indonesia⁶⁴ each have an impact, through their distinct characteristics, on his understanding of himself, his relationship to family, and his racial background.

For both the protagonist and narrator Barack Obama, *Chicago* represents both the most segregated city in the United States, as well as a setting of racial pride after the election of the African American mayor Harold Washington in 1983 (Obama, 2008, pp. 142-148). The pride of that election is what motivates Barack Obama to move to the city, to be part of the community and its sense of achievement. And in this way *Chicago* as a setting comes to symbolize Barack Obama's first attempts to understand the identity of someone other than himself, and how to do this in one of the epicenters of racial conflict in the United States. For Barack Obama Chicago as a setting is about considering others and their stories. Barack Obama's inclusion of the Chicago section in his story emphasizes a move from an internal consideration of his identity issues to a more external approach to these issues, where the need of other's for an understanding of their past becomes as essential for Barack Obama as his own needs to understand his personal past.

The use of *Kenya* as a setting at first seems to be a move back towards the more personal side of Barack Obama's struggle with identity, where the description of Kenya resembles the descriptions of Barack Obama's childhood Indonesia in many ways. Yet the difference is that the sense of a substitute family and community, which Barack Obama found in Chicago, is transferred to Kenya through Barack Obama's fatherly relations. Barack Obama sees many similarities in Kenya to both Indonesia and Chicago, but the detailed descriptions of his interactions with family members and people relate more to the community of Chicago, than to the foreign setting of Indonesia. This also reflects the conscious choice of Barack Obama as narrator, to place an

⁶⁴ Chapter two of the memoir sees Barack Obama move for the first time, from one home to another, and this movement is an essential element in the narrative progression throughout the memoir. The first move is from one major setting of his childhood, Hawaii, to another, Jakarta, Indonesia. In the initial pages of the second chapter Barack Obama describes Indonesia as a wild and foreign country, very different from his life in Hawaii. Yet the setting is not merely foreign, but also a tool of clarification for the narrative theme of finding a place in the world and feeling like a stranger in one's environment.

emphasis on his time in Kenya and in Chicago, through the allotted space in the memoir. Indonesia as a setting is instead placed within the childhood and youthful years of the *Origins* part of the book.

As in the *Origins* section, Kenya as setting is focused on the family unit as a source of shared stories. Here Barack Obama finds connection to the community, not through action on behalf of others as he did in Chicago, but simply through his own background. In Kenya he is recognized through his name as belonging to a specific place and a specific ancestral history. “Unlike in Chicago, where other people’s memories became a source of coherence for his evolving life story, these new family stories could become a part of Obama’s narrative with complete authenticity.” (Hammack, 2010, p. 198) Here it is important to note the significance of Barack Obama creating coherence through different people’s memories and *their* stories, as much as his own. But these communal stories from his surrogate family are, according to Hammack, trumped by stories that come from his biological family, because these are closer to Barack Obama’s own original narrative of self. “Obama’s account of Kenya offers formal continuity for his overall narrative of progressive self-discovery, as he navigates encounters with new family members. He accumulates new stories of his family...” (Hammack, 2010, p. 198) The way to learn about one’s past is described here as being through listening to other people’s stories and gathering these stories together to form a map of a narrative arc that reaches further back than one’s own birth. Yet in both families, it is the connection with other people and through shared stories that create authenticity of a constructed past and an identity in the present.

As the memoir progresses Barack Obama is able to link these different settings to each other through thematic and visual parallels. These parallels enhance the personal narrative theme of embracing a multitude of origins in one’s identity. Barack Obama for instance weaves familiar sights together across vast distances with an image in Chicago carrying him back to Indonesia:

”The store was poorly lit, but toward the back I could make out the figure of a young Korean woman sewing by hand as a child slept beside her. The scene took me back to my childhood, back to the markets of Indonesia: the hawkers, the leather workers, the old women chewing betel nut and swatting flies off their fruit with whisk brooms.... I saw those Djakarta markets for what they were: Fragile, precious things ... And yet for all that poverty, there remained in their lives a discernible order... It was the absence of such coherence that made a place like Altgeld [a neighborhood in Chicago] so desperate...” (Obama, 2008, pp. 182-183)

Through the comparison between persons in Chicago to persons in a similar situation in Indonesia, Barack Obama here both describes the problem of the lack of cohesiveness of a community in the inner city culture of Chicago, but also with society at large. The same problems facing people in Chicago, with their lack of a known background, could in the future also be the problems for Indonesians facing post industrialization. The challenge in both places is that of maintaining a communal identity. The problems of Altgeld, Chicago, are in this way given a global perspective, which is a relevant point to consider about Barack Obama's narrative technique. He does not focus so much on the *differences* between the settings of Indonesia and Illinois. Instead he focuses on *similarities*. He draws the places together through his descriptions of peoples and settings, and the open discussion of *how* he remembers the past in the memoir. Barack Obama as narrator uses the settings and characters of the memoir as methods of remembrance that eventually feed into his personal narrative theme of the ability to connect these different settings into a sensible and working whole.

Family Members as Characters

Characters, like settings, are essential in making a narrative stick in the audience's mind, and believable characters are often what make a narrative memorable. For Barack Obama in the memoir the characters he creates and uses are people he has met in his life, but not all are as real as they appear on the page. Some characters are compound characters whose traits are drawn together from different people Barack Obama has met. Instead of several people, one symbolic character emerges. Barack Obama has also changed names and skin color of certain people to make them fit his overall personal narrative theme of identity more precisely. However, since this is a memoir, some of the central characters, such as his immediate family have remained the same in name and skin color. Yet Barack Obama still uses these family members with distinct purposes in the plot of the memoir. In this way they can be analyzed as created characters in a narrative.

The Myth of the Father: Understanding the Present by Understanding the Past

"All my life, I had carried a single image of my father, one that I had sometimes rebelled against but had never questioned... because except for that one brief visit in Hawaii, he had never been present to foil the image, because I hadn't seen what perhaps most men see at some point in their lives: their father's body shrinking, their father's best hopes dashed, their father's face lined with grief and regret." (Obama, 2008, p. 220) While this reflection by Barack Obama on his father

comes later in the memoir, Barack Obama opens the book with the event of receiving the message of his father's death (Obama, 2008 pp. 3-5), and with his detached reaction to this news. The emotional disjuncture that Barack Obama feels in the moment is what sets off both the overarching plot and the personal narrative theme of a search for an identity in the memoir. Through Barack Obama's description of his father throughout the memoir, the reader gathers that Barack Obama had a strained relationship to the man because of the physical distance between them. At the same time Barack Obama as a protagonist in the memoir upholds a mythical image of the man, preserved in childhood images and family lore, precisely because the real man was not present to dash these images. This myth has even become formative for Barack Obama as a protagonist, and in this way the dreams from Barack Obama's father become guide lines for Barack Obama to struggle with in his own life. But the stories about his father are always *dreams*, rather than advice spoken outright. Barack Obama primarily hears the words of his father either from others, through their prisms on the father, or from recollected dreams he has of his father. These secondhand or created recollections of Barack Obama's father underscore the symbolic relationship between father and son.

While Barack Obama builds up a myth about his absent father through the narratives told by his family, and the dreams he has of the man, Barack Obama also gains knowledge that contradicts these myths through his *African* family. Through this family, he is able to create a more nuanced understanding of his father. In this piecing together of the events in his father's life, and in the search for the true character of the man, the importance of having and presenting a coherent life story, not only for the father himself, but also for those around the father, becomes a life lesson for Barack Obama. This also leads to another personal narrative theme: as narrator of the memoir Barack Obama views the act of narration as something significant for a person's life, not merely a method to present narratives of the past in a coherent fashion. The ability and willingness to tell one's narrative of self is essential to one's identity.

Here then is a reason, why Barack Obama sought out a detailed life story even before he was a political candidate on the national stage. As Barack Obama's African sister Auma says about their father:" His life was so scattered. People only knew scraps and pieces, even his own children." (Obama, 2008 p. 212) The sins of the father are passed on through an uncertain and incoherent character. The sister presents Barack Obama with new pieces of a puzzle to the major character in Barack Obama's memoir: the father that keeps eluding Barack Obama, as a symbol of the sense of a set identity that keeps eluding Barack Obama himself in the role as protagonist.

Throughout the memoir Barack Obama describes himself as an observer, who tries to understand the motivations of the people he meets, yet Barack Obama as protagonist has trouble understanding the main character of his father. In the same way as this affected the African family around the father, it is also a challenge to Barack Obama's own identity as protagonist in the memoir.

Through the different pieces of the identity puzzle Barack Obama gains of his father, Obama senior becomes a foreboding character for Barack Obama. The life that the father lived becomes both a warning and a towline for Barack Obama towards certain dangers. "I still couldn't read the signposts that might warn me away from the wrong turns he'd taken. Because of that confusion, because my image of him remained so contradictory – sometimes one thing, sometimes another, but never the two things at once – I would find myself, at random moments in the day, feeling as if I was living out a preordained script, as if I were following him into error, a captive to his tragedy." (Obama, 2008, p. 227) Barack Obama feels dragged into familiar structures throughout the memoir, and he describes problems both his father and grandfather faced because of their own pride. Yet Barack Obama eventually makes peace with his father's life and forgives him for being an absent parent. Barack Obama instead uses his father as a cautionary character, so that the older generation becomes an instruction to the present generation on how to live their lives more wisely and more connected with their family and community. With Barack Obama's memoir the main adversary is hardly a physical present. Rather Obama's father is a ghostly figure, a mixture of ideal and real that Obama has to confront mentally and spiritually rather than physically. In that way Barack Obama's narrative mirrors the U.S.' struggle with its own identity between the ideal nation and the actual nation and how to bridge the two.

Barack Obama's father is used as a parallel character to that of the protagonist Barack Obama, in the same way as a woman in Chicago was connected to the women of Indonesia. Both father and son have similar issues to deal with, yet by the end of the memoir they have found different ways to deal with the challenge. Being able to see the past clearly alleviates the chances for Barack Obama of making the same mistakes in the present, as his father did in the past.

The Present Parent: Understanding the Past as Interpreted by the Present

Barack Obama's mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, is the parent who stayed with him in most of his childhood. As a narrator in the memoir Barack Obama often uses her as a gateway to understand his father and what brought the two parents together. Barack Obama uses his parents'

relationship to describe a unique bond between two different backgrounds and makes it into a universal desire: "... the love of someone who knows your life in the round, a love that will survive disappointment. She saw my father as everyone hopes at least one other person might see him; she had tried to help the child who never knew him see him in the same way." (Obama, 2008, p. 127) For Barack Obama the mother is the present everyday being in contrast to the elusive figure of the father. It is the mother who retells the "old" story of how the marriage broke apart between her and Barack Obama's father (pp. 125-126). A story that is so central to the American Obama family's life and understanding of their progression through their communal narrative that it needs to be retold to the son to be confirmed on a regular basis.

Yet the mother's privileged speaker position as the narrator of family history also opens up for a more critical view of the mother compared to the view of the father. A special emphasis is on the mother's romantic view of the parents' relationship. With one anecdote, Barack Obama questions whether his mother's view of the past is as objective as he had accepted in his childhood. Barack Obama describes a moment of revelation, when he looks at his mother's face in a theatre, as they watch a rerun of the film *Black Orpheus* (1959): "At that moment, I felt as if I were being given a window into her heart, the unreflective heart of her youth." (Obama, 2008, p. 124) What Barack Obama sees is his mother's youthful view of race – as a fantasy. The moment described is also important in a broader sense. For Barack Obama, the narrator and observer, people become more transparent through the revelation of their memories. They open themselves up by sharing their past: "In her smiling, slightly puzzled face, I saw what all children must see at some point if they are to grow up – their parents' lives revealed to them as separate and apart, reaching out beyond the point of their union or the birth of a child, lives unfurling back to grandparents, great-grandparents, an infinite number of chance meetings, misunderstandings, projected hopes, limited circumstances." (p. 127) Once more Barack Obama combines the foreign with the ordinary aspects of his life. He uses the romantic idea of separation for his parents by both oceans and skin color in the 1960s, and positions this within dilemmas that are of general concern in most people's lives: understanding one's parents in a more complete way, not only as parents but as individual people with their own lives. In discussing this relationship between child and parent, Barack Obama also points out the temporal challenge of actually achieving an understanding of important characters in one's life. The life stories of these central people in one's life are over time polished and edited to fit messages and lessons these people want to convey to the next generation, but the clarity of the messages, risks losing a more truthful nuance and insight into the lives lived.

The Greatest Generation of Americans

Barack Obama was not only raised by his mother and the dreams of his absent, mythical father figure, but also his American grandparents. Both are described in a more down-to-earth manner in the memoir than the parents through their whirlwind romance. Barack Obama's Grandfather, Stanley Dunham, is throughout the memoir described as a dreamer: "... Gramps would wander into my room to tell me stories of his youth... some scheme he still harbored... I saw that the plans grew bolder the further they receded from possibility." (p. 55) Barack Obama uses these generational dreams to speak of the thwarted middle class aspirations that his grandfather shared with many other Americans. With his grandfather the narrative progression in his life took place primarily in the hectic moves of his youth and the early life of the family, until they reached Hawaii and could go no further within the borders of the U.S. "They saw no more destinations to hope for." (p. 58) Life, Barack Obama says with the character of his grandfather, is not only a straight line of progress, but can also contain the dead ends of unresolved dreams that linger half planted.

The Grandmother, Toots, is contrasted with the Grandfather. Her character arc is not one of reaching for high-flung personal dreams bound to fail. Instead Toot's more realistic dreams have been thwarted by others at the bank she worked at: "There she would stay for twenty years, with scarcely a vacation, watching as her male counterparts kept moving up the corporate ladder..." (p. 56)⁶⁵ What is essential in Barack Obama's narration of both his grandparents' characters is their focus on sacrifice for the next generation, and that the future generation holds the promise to do better than the previous one. In this way Barack Obama uses his grandparents to present the American dream in a generational structure within his own family unit.

Yet Barack Obama also uses the older generation to question past value paradigms in the United States. The grandparents are forced to deal with the issue of race through their daughter's relationship to Barack Obama's African father. One of the most well-known, and often referenced, anecdotes from Barack Obama's early life deals with this issue of race and the generational divide on the issue. At one point in the memoir, it is revealed that Barack Obama's Grandmother experiences an event where she feels afraid of a black man, which shocks Barack Obama as the

⁶⁵ Obama would later use this family narrative of his grandmother's life to point out inequality for women in the workplace, but without mentioning the other side of his grandmother's aspirations from the memoir, that her dream was of "...a house with a white picket fence, days spent baking or playing bridge or volunteering at the local library." (Obama, 2008 p. 57) The stated desire of his grandmother in the memoir, then, is something else than what he tries to instill in young women in his future political speeches.

protagonist in the memoir. “They had sacrificed again and again for me. They had poured all their lingering hopes into my success. Never had they given me reason to doubt their love; I doubted if they ever would. And yet I knew that men who might easily have been my brothers could still inspire their rawest fears.” (p. 89) Barack Obama not only paints a personal picture of his grandparents, he uses them as characters to display the sacrifice of the ‘greatest generation’ of Americans, but also the same generation’s problematic attitudes of prejudice towards identities stemming from other cultural backgrounds, something that is detrimental to Barack Obama’s personal narrative theme of inclusion and a communal definition that reaches beyond previous set boundaries.

Symbolic use of Characters: Synecdoches, Parallels and a Communal Past

Barack Obama often ties certain prominent characters to the settings in the memoir. In this way he lets the characters become embodiments of his experiences of the local place. With Indonesia, the description of the country is tied closely with the character description of Lolo, Barack Obama’s stepfather from his mother’s second marriage. The description and assumptions of Lolo’s thoughts and actions are used as a synecdoche to mirror the development of Indonesia itself as a nation, and the challenges facing the country⁶⁶. Other examples of this use of parallels between character and setting in the memoir are Reverend Jeremiah Wright and Barack Obama’s community organizing co-workers in Chicago. They become symbols of resilience and hope through their personal narratives in an area of Chicago that seems abandoned by the rest of society. In Kenya Barack Obama’s African family represents the many diverse faces of an African country and the opportunities and challenges facing these developing communities. Through these parallels, Barack Obama as narrator engages the reader through characters that are shaped to symbolize more than merely believable entities on the page. They function at what Phelan would describe as a thematic level to describe their setting. In the same way as Barack Obama himself, in public speeches, would later present his “unlikely story” as the story of the United States in the 2008 election cycle.

Many characters in the memoir are used as parallels to either Barack Obama the protagonist or between communities. These parallels are made between family members or between characters

⁶⁶ Barack Obama describes a boxing match between himself and Lolo, in which Lolo wants to teach Barack Obama a lesson. The boxing match becomes an image of Barack Obama’s relationship with Lolo: “So it was to Lolo that I turned for guidance and instruction... And his knowledge of the world seemed inexhaustible. Not just how to change a flat tire or open in chess. He knew more elusive things, ways of managing the emotions I felt, ways to explain fate’s constant mysteries.” (Obama 2008, page 38) Lolo is a reflection of the experiences of a harder world in Indonesia compared to Hawaii. In Indonesia, one must not be weak and measure out one’s goodness towards the weak carefully, according to Lolo in the memoir.

on different continents, and they represent different choices and strategies for Barack Obama in his role as protagonist: the different roads he can choose for himself in his own life. One such parallel character is Barack Obama's older brother, Roy⁶⁷, who is described as feeling removed from the American dream and still battling with the memory of their father in a more direct way than Barack Obama himself (Obama, 2008, pp. 265-267). In this case, the parallel between characters should be understood as the brother representing a potential life path for Barack Obama, if he did not make choices that were different than the ones his brother had made.

Another use of parallel characters is between a young African American named Kyle and a young African man that is part of Barack Obama's family in Kenya. In a chapter from the Chicago section of the memoir, Barack Obama focuses on the description of Kyle and a basketball game gone wrong, where Kyle lashes out against an older player (pp. 254-255). Barack Obama parallels this incident with Kyle in Chicago with a family member in Africa. After a game of basketball in Kenya they speak of the future for the young African man, and Barack Obama finds a similar lack of focus as he did with Kyle. The solution to both the young men's lack of aspirations is also shown in parallel fashion. The young men should find their roots, and use these as a foundation to build their future on. These parallels are relevant to consider because of what it tells the reader of Barack Obama's view of the need to understand one's own personal past, *and* one's communal past. As suggested earlier, Barack Obama sees the ability to articulate one's past through narration as a way to function as an individual in the present.

Barack Obama as narrator makes the frustration felt by the young American man Kyle a representation of an issue of American schools in general as described to him by an activist named Assante: "... for the black child, everything's turned upside down. From day one, what's he learning about? Someone else's history. Someone else's culture. Not only that, this culture he's supposed to learn is the same culture that's systematically rejected him, denied his humanity." (p. 258) This description of the need for cultural stepping stones to integrate young African American people in the communities of larger American cities, both refers to Barack Obama's view of how a conscious knowledge of history, official and vernacular, is important for the individual's ability to walk knowingly into the future. The way the individual can connect to the larger group is through a shared history. Public access to the past then is a necessary element to understand one's place in a

⁶⁷ The brother's African name is Malik

community, something that Barack Obama as a protagonist seeks for himself throughout the memoir.

For Barack Obama the narrator, the use of people as characters in the memoir is about reflecting an aspect of the protagonist, himself, in the people, he has met, through a common understanding of motivation and of a shared past. Both character motivation and at least an inclination of a past are important elements in creating believable characters. Because Barack Obama's emphasis is on finding these links to a shared experience between people, he is able to use the different characters in the book (made up or real) to serve his thematic purposes, especially when he links the characters' life experiences to his own:

"... beneath the small talk and sketchy biographies and received opinions people carried within them some central explanation of themselves. Stories full of terror and wonder, studded with events that still haunted or inspired them. Sacred Stories. And it was this realization, I think, that finally allowed me to share more of myself with the people I was working with, to break out of the larger isolation that I had carried with me to Chicago. I was tentative at first, afraid that my prior life would be too foreign for South Side sensibilities; that I might somehow disturb people's expectations of me. Instead, as people listened to my stories of Toot or Lolo or my mother and father, of flying kites in Djakarta or going to school dances at Punahou, they would nod their heads or shrug or laugh... Then they'd offer a story to match or confound mine, a knot to bind our experiences together – a lost father, an adolescent brush with crime, a wandering heart, a moment of simple grace. As time passed, I found that these stories, taken together, had helped me bind my world together, that they gave me the sense of place and purpose I'd been looking for." (p. 190)

This long paragraph from the memoir is worth including here, because it illustrates how Barack Obama, as both the narrator and the protagonist of the text, sees people's own narratives as not just a tool to understand his own past, nor as only a family ritual. Rather, Barack Obama sees storytelling as a communal experience, and a way to establish links with other people. Barack Obama thereby sees narration as a way to constitute groups of people as well as constituting a purpose in his own life. With the memoir itself as a text, Barack Obama creates a way to share the stories he hears from these people with an even larger audience than the family, group or community that he had lived and worked with up to that point.

The Protagonist Barack/Barry Obama

In a personal memoir the main character is often the narrator himself. Recalling in ‘voice-over’ what has shaped and influenced him throughout his life. Barack Obama often places himself as protagonist in the background as an observer in the settings and events of the memoir. In the early chapters of the *Origin* and *Kenya* sections he lets his family tell the story of the past, rather than doing it himself as the protagonist. Yet Barack Obama as a narrator is present throughout, and both his descriptions of himself and the descriptions of him by others are interesting to consider when determining what kind of persona Barack Obama wants to establish for the reader via his narrative of self. Most descriptions Barack Obama gives of himself as a young man, often suggest a more somber personality compared to how he describes his contemporaries of his youth. Barack Obama describes himself as an introspective teenager and young man that often sought answers on his own and through books on Malcom X, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and others⁶⁸. Through these previously lived and recorded lives Barack Obama tries to find a path for his own life, while his teenage friend Ray argues that “I do not need books to tell me how to be black.” (p. 87). In the *Origins* section of the memoir, Barack Obama suggests that he adheres to the past of other African Americans more than his contemporaries do. While the reader is given the sense that Barack Obama as the protagonist is turned inward, away from his fellow co-workers and friends, his greatest fear, as stated by himself in the memoir, is that of not belonging. This fear also haunts him in early adulthood: “Wandering through Altgeld or other tough neighborhoods, my fears were always internal: the old fears of not belonging.” (p. 253) This fear fits well with the personal narrative theme of finding the balance between one’s diverse backgrounds. The more often Barack Obama returns to this fear in the memoir, the higher the stakes are for his journey to overcome it, and it remains an internal antagonist to his theme of inclusion throughout the memoir.

Barack Obama as the Narrator of a Personal Past

Barack Obama’s description of himself as the protagonist in the memoir offers interesting insights into his relationship to the other characters in his life, and how he uses himself and the

⁶⁸ Perhaps the chapter that indulges the introspectiveness of Barack Obama’s character the most is the chapter that focuses on a late night, after a college party, where Barack Obama is alone with his thoughts in an apartment. The mood of the setting corresponds more loyally with how other young people could feel at this point of their life than some of the previous chapters that are too insightful to escape the perspective of a narrator from the present. The young Barack Obama of the college scene draws on musical and film references. The protagonist Obama is focused on the significance of cultural products, letting them stand in for the experiences of life that have yet to fill his mind and thoughts: “And now just the two of us to wait for the sunrise, me and Billie Holiday” (Obama 2008, p. 92).

other characters to establish his personal narrative themes, which would also become prevalent in his political rhetoric. Yet his role as narrator of the memoir is just as relevant to focus on for the purpose of establishing a better understanding of Barack Obama as a public speaker. Barack Obama's relationship to his personal past in the memoir is particularly interesting in this connection.

When discussing the relationship between the past and the present Barack Obama focuses on his family, and their retelling of the past. The stories repeated within the family are not only great moments of change, that helped make the story of Barack Obama "unlikely", as it was later described by him, there are also minor events that could have occurred in any person's life. In this way Barack Obama, as we have discussed earlier, connects recognizable personal moments for his audience in his childhood with more foreign aspects, such as the lonely visit of his father to Hawaii. Barack Obama acknowledges how this singular visit has been altered by memory: "... when I reach back into my memory for the words of my father, the small interactions or conversations we might have had, they seem irretrievably lost. Perhaps they're imprinted too deeply, his voice the seed of all sorts of tangled arguments that I carry on with myself, as impenetrable now as the pattern of my genes, so that all I can perceive is the worn-out shell." (p. 71) Here Barack Obama recognizes the difficulty of recollecting the past in an objective way. What he also argues is that the use of the past constitutes a constant negotiation with oneself about its significance. This creates several levels of meaning to one's personal past that become entangled in ways that cloud the original memory. This is an expansion on his personal narrative theme of understanding one's past to understand one's present self. While one may have an image of oneself in the present, this image should never be seen as complete – rather the subjectivity of its formation is a perpetual condition that cannot be entirely removed from the identity formation process.

This conscious approach to the subjectivity of recounting the past is also what sets Barack Obama's memoir apart from many biographies by other presidential hopefuls. Rather than a fixed conclusion or moral to the story, the ambiguity of searching for a personal identity dominates the memoir: "I learned long ago to distrust my childhood and the stories that shaped it. It was only many years later... I understood that I had spent much of my life trying to rewrite these stories, plugging up holes in the narrative, accommodating unwelcome details, projecting individual choices against the blind sweep of history, all in the hope of extracting some granite slab of truth upon which my unborn children can firmly stand." (Obama, 2008, p. xvi) This approach to narrative is reminiscent of Georgakopoulou's stated intention with her focus on "small stories", to place a

greater emphasis on the constantly changing stories we tell about ourselves, rather than the myths set in stone, or granite as Barack Obama suggests in the above quote.

It is therefore also in the *narration* of his life Barack Obama shows a different approach to his personal past. Barack Obama is very conscious about what *defines* a narrative in the memoir. The ambiguousness of his relationship to the narration to his past is also reflected in the plot structure of the memoir where he ends the book before some of his greatest personal achievements: the years at Harvard and the marriage with Michelle Obama. This shows that his intention with the memoir is to focus on the struggle rather than the end position of equilibrium. The resolution of the narrative is not the goal of its telling. Rather the ongoing questioning of where one is in one's narrative of self, and the value found in this questioning, is the resolution to Barack Obama's narrative of self.

Why Should a Story be told?

When considering what instigates the need or motivation to tell a narrative, Barack Obama as the narrator is very much focused on movement. He essentially sees movement as a driving force in a narrative, which relates to the role of progression in a plot. Considering his well-travelled childhood this seems as an understandable deduction for Barack Obama to make. The emphasis on journeys in the memoir also provides a contrast to his search for a more permanent and anchored identity through community and place (Hammack, 2010). But the focus on movement goes further than the physical relocations Barack Obama undergoes during his life. The search for something new, or different, is not just what drives a narrative being told, but also a key ingredient in a life being lived for Barack Obama.

In the memoir Barack Obama focuses on events in his life where there is movement on both a physical and psychological level. At different points in the memoir, he says the story could have stopped. The reason for this is not because of death or old age. Rather it is at points of equilibrium in the narrative that Barack Obama considers ending the narration. At these moments, where the potential for conflict has subsided, a story loses its inner spark and *raison d'être* for Barack Obama. This is also true for his own narrative in the way he ends the memoir, with a jump in time to the wedding with Michelle Obama which represents a calmer period in his life, than we have witnessed throughout the memoir. This emphasis on movement as a catalyst for a narrative worth telling also influences how Barack Obama begins the memoir with his grandparents, as they settle on Hawaii after their long journey across the states of the mainland. Barack Obama writes that their stories in a

sense halted on Hawaii in favor of the next generation's narrative. Movement, progression, or change is essential for a narrative as Barack Obama sees it in the memoir. The need for movement also carried over in his broad journey metaphor of the 2008 campaign, which other scholars have pointed to (Darsey, 2009), as well as the more specific linkage to the Civil Rights Movement, as we saw in John Murphy's article on the invocation of the Joshua generation by Barack Obama (Murphy, 2011).

The Mending and tending of Memories

As mentioned previously, Barack Obama at certain points throughout the memoir pulls back and points out different parallels in his life, both between places and between characters. He even comments as narrator on this practice: "Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I can construct a certain logic to my decision, show how becoming an organizer was a part of that larger narrative, starting with my father and his father before him, my mother and her parents, my memories of Indonesia with its beggars and farmers and the loss of Lolo to power, on through Ray and Frank, Marcus and Regina; my move to New York; my father's death. I can see that my choices were never truly mine alone – and that that is how it should be, that to assert otherwise is to chase after a sorry sort of freedom." (Obama, 2008, pp. 133-134) The arc of his narrative of self that Barack Obama describes here can be seen as a consciously revisionary explanation for the life he has lived. Even his doubting teenage self fits in, as he pulls together all the important characters in his life, and how they have influenced him and his choices⁶⁹.

Yet Barack Obama is not only focused on linking the characters and events of his own life into a coherent whole. He also draws a parallel between himself and African Americans as a whole, and suggests a strength in finding this recognition between one's own struggles and others: "They [images of protests by African Americans] told me (although even this much understanding may have come later, is also a construct, containing its own falsehoods) that I wasn't alone in my particular struggles, and that communities had never been a given in this country, at least not for blacks. Communities had to be created, fought for, tended like gardens. They expanded or contracted with the dreams of men." (Obama, 2008, p. 134) Barack Obama again acknowledges the

⁶⁹ The timing of events and the connection between them also interests Obama as he considers them at one point: "...the timing of [Auma's] call, the particular sequence of events, the raised expectations and then the dashed hopes, coming at a time when the idea of becoming an organizer was still just that, an idea in my head, a vague tug at my heart." (Obama, 2008, p. 138) One event here enables another series of events to come to fruition as Obama decides to move to Chicago.

conscious construction of the meaning of the past. What he states here is that a constant mending and tending of these memories to keep them consistent with the present, is necessary not only for the individual self, but also for centers of community. This then calls for a constant repetition of stories of commonality to strengthen bonds of a community, and achieve what Condit described as communal definition (Condit, 1985). Barack Obama himself describes this process of connecting one's own life with that of other people in the following way: "I made a chain between my life and the faces I saw, borrowing other people's memories. In this way I tried to take possession of the city, make it my own. Yet another sort of magic." (Obama, 2008, p. 146) Barack Obama in this way finds ownership of a larger communal narrative by connecting himself with people through a common past imagined, and perpetually retold.

With this reading of Barack Obama's memoir, with an eye on his own writing on narration, the chapter has sought to point out how the personal narrative themes of Barack Obama's rhetoric during his campaigns and his time in office can be seen as being formed through this text: Barack Obama's emphasis on an identity that has the capacity to include more than one background; finding a balance between these backgrounds by accepting that change is a constant in modern life; acknowledging the subjectivity of narrating one's past; yet seeing narration as not merely a method to present a personal past, but an act that in itself creates consubstantiality between people; The importance of knowing one's personal and communal past to function in the present; The need for generational commitment to pass on the stories from one generation to another. These personal themes connect to the presidential narrative theme of the self, as well as the narrative themes of people and nation, as we will see in the later chapters of the dissertation. Identifying Barack Obama's use of narrative elements of characters and settings has in this way helped us establish his personal narrative themes.

The Speeches by the 'Early Barack Obama'

Having considered both Barack Obama's establishment of personal narrative themes as part of his narrative of self in the memoir⁷⁰, we turn to the speeches given by Barack Obama up until his first presidential inaugural address in 2009. These speeches in different ways tapped into the source

⁷⁰ See appendix A for a brief overview of other biographies written on Barack Obama.

material of the narrative of self to help ensure Barack Obama's ethos as a speaker and connect him to the voters through narrative identification with the personal narrative themes.

While different parts of speeches throughout the campaign will be referenced, the speeches in focus of this chapter are where Barack Obama focused on introducing himself as a speaker/candidate to the audience, and where Barack Obama had to either defend or summarize his candidacy for the White House. These speeches include his 2004 DNC speech; his 2007 Announcement speech as a candidate for the presidency; his *A More Perfect Union* speech from 2008, and his Election Night victory speech 2008. The close reading of primarily the epideictic elements in these speeches contains the following considerations: Barack Obama's overall use of settings and characters in the speeches; Barack Obama's references to characters such as family members and other contemporary Americans; The inclusion of historic moments and figures such as the Civil Rights Movement and Abraham Lincoln; And the way Barack Obama structurally links these narrative elements to his personal narrative themes and a description of his own role as narrator in the speeches.

The Personal Narrative Themes of Inclusion and Generational Responsibility

As was the case with the memoir, Barack Obama uses his own family members in his speeches as a way to exemplify his connection with American national issues. The speech that crystallizes this use of his family is the 2004 DNC speech: "My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father -- my grandfather -- was a cook, a domestic servant to the British..." (Boston, 2004⁷¹) And on the American side of the family: "She [the mother] was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor my grandfather signed up for duty; joined Patton's army, marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised a baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line." (Boston, 2004) Here Barack Obama's goal is to introduce himself to a national audience, and he does so by juxtaposing the two sides of his family background, his African father and grandfather on one side, and his American heritage through his mother's family's connection to Kansas and the

⁷¹ Due to the number of speeches by Barack Obama covered in the dissertation, references to his speeches will include the place where the speech was delivered instead of Barack Obama's last name. His 2004 DNC speech was for instance delivered in Boston, and will therefore be referenced as (Boston, 2004). President Obama's State of the Union speeches and Inaugural Addresses will be referenced in the following way: (SOTU, YEAR) and (Inaugural 1st/2nd).

history of the United States on the other side. On the American side of his family, Barack Obama emphasizes historic events such as the Great Depression, the Pearl Harbor attack, a WW II military campaign, the work on the home front, and the move west to Hawaii in the spirit of the American pioneers. With this description of a past well known to many Americans Barack Obama moves on to his daughters as representatives for the future and thereby connects the past and future generations through himself: "...aware that my parents' dreams live on in my two precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible." (Boston, 2004) Barack Obama's introduction to his narrative self is as much focused on his family as on himself. By placing an emphasis on their stories as a collective generational narrative of a family, Barack Obama is able to point to the duality of having an unlikely family story, while still being able to prove the connection between his narrative of self and well-known historic events in U.S. history. Barack Obama's ethos as national narrator does not come from only the unlikely events in his narrative of self, but from the incorporation of these unlikely events into the highly familiar story of the 'greatest generation' of Americans.

Barack Obama continues to reference this generational narrative in his speeches, but perhaps he put it to the most personal use in the *A More Perfect Union* speech (Philadelphia, 2008), where he addressed a contemporary and personal problem for his candidature. During the primary season, news broke about the controversial views of the leader of Barack Obama's religious community, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. In video clips Reverend Wright could be seen giving radical sermons that criticized the United States. Besides the content of the sermons, the image of an angry African American man in a privileged speaker position also posed an unwelcome parallel link to people who feared Barack Obama's racial background could have an influence on his presidency. The controversy placed Barack Obama's political candidacy in a historic racial frame. Barack Obama would therefore have to draw on his personal narrative theme of the value of knowing such a historic past to explain contemporary problems. In this way the *A More Perfect Union* speech also connected clearly with the personal narrative theme of inclusion of different communities in Barack Obama's memoir. The narrative of self for Barack Obama in the *A More Perfect Union* speech was established through past generations again, and this time used as a credential to speak more directly and in greater detail on issues of U.S. history.

The Personal Narrative Theme of Knowing One's Past and Having the Ability to Narrate It

Barack Obama often situates the speech situation and his own speaker position in historic terms with an early quote on history, going as far back as the founding of the United States, or a reference to the documents describing this foundation (Boston, 2004). He then narrates the arc of history from that point on and up to the current moment or issue at hand. Along the way in this narration, he references certain selected events in history that help him frame the historic plot and lead to the concluding message intended for the present audience. The emphasis on historic connections relates to the personal narrative theme of telling stories and knowing one's past through these stories, which we saw articulated directly in Barack Obama's memoir. In the speeches there is not as much room for open reflection of this manner on the subjective use of history, yet there are clear narrative elements to be found in Barack Obama's speeches with the use of both settings and characters.

In the 'early Obama' speeches, before he became president, the character of President Abraham Lincoln is a clear and constant presence for instance. Barack Obama initially connected President Lincoln to the 2008 campaign through references to the former president's life. Barack Obama also drew on direct and indirect contextual references while speaking in the state of Illinois, where Lincoln had spent large parts of his life, and which Barack Obama represented politically at the time of the 2008 election cycle: "... the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible. He tells us that there is power in words. He tells us that there's power in conviction. That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are one people. He tells us that there's power in hope. As Lincoln organized the forces arrayed against slavery, he was heard to say this: "Of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought to battle through." (Springfield, 2007) Barack Obama here both speaks *for* Lincoln, as well as citing him directly from Lincoln's *A House Divided* speech. Barack Obama's physical description of Lincoln, as tall and gangly, is referenced in contrast to the former president's eloquent words, and in this way makes the presidential words stand out even more. What Barack Obama also uses this narrative spark of Abraham Lincoln's life and politics for is not only to invoke a link between his own words and the famous words of the president, but also to suggest that although a candidate for the presidency may not look the part in a traditional way, which President Lincoln did not, this physical appearance faded away once the words and intentions of the candidate are heard. Barack Obama asks for the same consideration of his own candidacy and rhetoric to be judged on its content and not his physical appearance.

Barack Obama references Lincoln again in his *2008 Election Night Victory* speech: “Let’s remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House, a Party founded on the values of self-reliance and individual liberty and national unity. Those are values that we all share... As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours: “We are not enemies but friends....” Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.”” (Chicago, 2008) Barack Obama uses the words of President Lincoln, both to invoke a parallel between the character of Lincoln and his own candidature again, but also to connect Lincoln’s words on partisanship to the current climate that Barack Obama is stepping into after the Bush presidency. Barack Obama describes his opponents through the sainted figure of Lincoln to emphasize a shared commonality in values resembling the goal of Thomas Jefferson in his first inaugural address, where differing opinions should not be mistaken for incompatible values according to Barack Obama. Barack Obama even uses Lincoln to contrast the Civil War conflict with the present election period to underscore that in the light of history the current differences seem trifle.

The use of historic settings can also be found in even shorter bursts in the speeches, in narrative sparks that in a sentence or a word connects the audience to certain events in U.S. history and their shared meaning. For instance when Barack Obama speaks of the abstract term “hope” in his 2004 DNC address, he explains the term by stringing it out across U.S. history and connects it to the 2004 democratic presidential and VP candidates, as well as himself: “It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a millworker’s son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.” (Boston, 2004) Barack Obama in this structure of short narrative sparks hits on first two settings related to fundamental narratives of US history: The survival of slaves through a communal definition of songs and the journey of immigrants to the North American Continent from other continents. That Barack Obama decides to connect these two specific events in U.S. history, slavery and immigration, is something we will deal with in greater detail in the next chapter on narrative of the people, yet already here it is worth pointing out the link made by Barack Obama, as he places them together in his introduction of himself to the American People. The three narrative sparks in the quote that relate to the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, vice-presidential candidate, John Edwards, and himself are connected to the preceding historical references, tying together the narrative themes of self and of people. The three

narrative sparks also give the three men their own place in U.S. history, by focusing on military conflict; economic opportunity; and immigration. All three are described as part of a younger generation of Americans, through the use of words such as “young”, “son”, and “kid” indicating the men’s progression from humble beginnings and through the challenges of their life. To his own narrative spark, Barack Obama reiterates the parallel characteristic of President Lincoln’s gangly figure to his own skinny figure, and Barack Obama also comments on his own name, calling it “funny”, defusing the more sinister connotations some voters might have felt about names such as Obama and Hussein in 2004.

The benefit of regarding these shorter sentences as narratives in their content is that it explains the “storyworld” (Herman, 2004) that these narrative sparks seek to ignite in the audience. While the narrative sparks in their own right may not have fully developed characters or a firm setting, the potential is there for the audience to pick up on the references, much in the same way as friends pick up on familiar references in conversations. This combined with more completed narrative anecdotes help to illustrate the broader narrative arcs that Barack Obama spoke into with these speeches.

The Narrative Arc of History: Racial Progress in the United States as a Question of Communal Inclusion

Perhaps the personal narrative theme that connected to all the different presidential narrative themes (Self, People, Nation) the most for Barack Obama in the 2008 campaign was that of inclusion of divided racial identities. Particularly in his response to Jeremiah Wright’s inflammatory remarks on racial inequality in the United States, Barack Obama used a number of narrative structures to help him argue his view of the relationship between himself and the voice of dissent that the reverend represented. Barack Obama began the *A More Perfect Union* speech with a narrative focused on the issue of slavery in early American history: From the compromise between promise and ideals in the constitution, through the debates leading to the Civil War and nearly a hundred years later the Civil Rights Movement. Each of these historic events are interpreted by Barack Obama as events seeking “... to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.” (Philadelphia, 2008) Barack Obama then positions himself as a narrator of this history by presenting his more familiar narrative of self through a generational struggle: “I’m the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton’s army during World War II, and a

white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas... I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners, an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters.” (Philadelphia, 2008) Barack Obama once again establishes his ethos as national narrator through the history of his family, as we saw in the memoir and the 2004 DNC speech. Here he describes this history as an inheritance, because it cannot be forgotten, and is passed on between generations. By speaking of the inheritance of blood that both his wife and his daughters carry with them, he also infuses himself into this tangled family tree, of slaves and slave owners, since his argument on family is how difference is diffused over time as the generations are brought together.

While he may not descend directly from a slave Barack Obama still seeks to affirm his ability to speak on the issue of racial history. “... it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many, we are truly one.” (Philadelphia, 2008) The use of the verb *seared* suggests an unbreakable bond with history that cannot be torn from one’s very body. The narrative of inclusion of disparate identities is here described by Barack Obama as something that can be physically felt and needs to be considered with the image of the searing of slaves coming to mind. While the word can be seen as a negative approach to a dark passage in one’s ancestral history, it is also important to keep in mind that for Barack Obama, the knowledge of one’s past, no matter how painful, is a necessary step in knowing oneself in the present.

Once Barack Obama has established the historic link between his own background and U.S. history on slavery, he progresses to narrate the individual case of Reverend Wright. Barack Obama seeks to position this case in a similar relationship between an individual person, here in the shape of Wright, to the larger history the reverend is connected with: “He is a man who served his country as a United States Marine, and who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who over 30 years has led a church that serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth -- by housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.” (Philadelphia, 2008) By emphasizing both the military sacrifice, educational background, and the good deeds that Reverend Wright has achieved in his own life, Barack Obama seeks to establish a more nuanced view of the Reverend than the media presented at the time and incorporate the Reverend in American institutions rather than setting him apart. Barack Obama then references his *Dreams* memoir and the event in the church where he sees a connection between

himself and others through the stories told by Reverend Wright. Barack Obama in this way moves from the narration of the larger arc of U.S. history to an emphasis on placing himself as narrator within the narrative of Reverend Wright as a witness to the Reverend's words and deeds, which allows Barack Obama to speak more personally on the issue of Reverend Wright.

Having presented a broader historic narrative on the issue of racial conflict, and a more personal narrative on the relationship with Reverend Wright, Barack Obama then strengthens his personal connection to the issue, by including a well-known narrative of his family. This generational narrative in the *A More Perfect Union* speech converges with the lesser known narrative of Reverend Wright's person, as Barack Obama uses his grandmother's fear of a black man to describe the faults in even descent people: "I can no more disown him [Reverend Wright] than I can disown my white grandmother, a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me... but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed her by on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe." (Philadelphia, 2008) For Barack Obama, Reverend Wright contains both good and bad aspects of the community he represents, in the same way as Barack Obama's white grandmother represents both good and bad aspects of an older generation of white Americans. In this way Barack Obama includes Reverend Wright in Barack Obama's more familiar personal narrative themes of inclusion of different communities as well the emphasis on generational progress. Barack Obama expands both themes to include communities at large. Because of this expansion Barack Obama is able to state that "I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community." (Philadelphia, 2008)

In this way Barack Obama uses his well-known narrative of self that focuses on his family to make the transition back to a broader approach to the narrative theme of inclusion, from the individual case of Reverend Wright to the community at large and race in the United States. This is perhaps the most important narrative structure established in the *A more perfect Union* speech. While Barack Obama states at one point "we do not need to recite the history of racial injustice in this country," (Philadelphia, 2008) he still does so, and he moves through a number of narrative sparks in U.S. history such as the Jim Crow laws, and the judicial verdict of Brown Vs. Board of Education to reference both the setbacks and the successful steps towards the present. With these setbacks and victories Barack Obama seeks to explain the emotions felt by the African American community on the issue of inequality, and the anger it has created. Just as Barack Obama paralleled his grandmother's individual negative sides with Reverend Wright's anger, Barack Obama then

parallels the anger felt in the African American community with a similar feeling of shame and anger for white Americans in the light of joblessness and economic uncertainty. In this way Barack Obama mirrors Martin Luther King's emphasis in the *I have a Dream* speech on economic issues, rather than only racial issues. Through the sense of frustration the economic issue has created, the challenge is made into a larger national problem rather than merely presenting a problem for one group of Americans.

Having made his way through a broad, national narrative drawing on history to a more personal narrative of one character and back again to a national level, Barack Obama finally moves the narrative towards the future where the audience is given a more direct role to play, as we have seen several scholars suggest as essential for the use of narratives in rhetorical discourse, and which other scholars have criticized as lacking from other presidents' use of narratives. Once again, Barack Obama focuses on the inclusion of communities, rather than singling out specific Americans that can lead the way on progress. The African American community, the Caucasian community, and the future generations of their children are tied together by Barack Obama: "For the African American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances, for better health care and better schools and better jobs, to the larger aspirations of all Americans -- the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man who's been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family." (Philadelphia, 2008) Barack Obama in this way connects the issue of race to a number of other challenges facing Americans, as well as suggesting that the solution to these challenges must be found by recognizing the similar problems Americans share, rather than the ones setting them apart.

The Anecdotal Narratives of Ashley and Anne Nixon Cooper

Thus far, we have primarily focused on the narrative structures of the broader narrative arcs and the shorter narrative sparks used by Barack Obama in his speeches. The speeches dealt with here, however, also include two examples of the narrative structure of the anecdotal narrative. The two anecdotes relate directly to Barack Obama's personal narrative theme from the memoir of community and identity inclusion. The anecdotes do so both at a personal level with an emphasis on a particular character, as well as in a parallel structure to a broader national narrative arc of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.

Personal Narrative Theme of Storytelling as Community Building

In the *A More Perfect Union* speech Barack Obama uses the narrative structure of the anecdote near the end of the speech, to speak about a campaign worker named Ashley (Obama, 2008). While the rest of the speech has addressed race from different angles of either personal connections for Barack Obama or through the history of the United States, the anecdote actually has the opposite intention. Its emphasis is on how race should be seen as a *non-issue* within the Obama-campaign, emphasizing the interaction between the young, white Ashley and an older African American man. Their shared understanding of each other occurs through a narrative within a narrative that Ashley shares at a campaign meeting. The anecdote of Ashley matters for Barack Obama's speech, both because the characters in the speech represent a removal of both generational and racial lines in his campaign: and in this way functions as a clear example of what his personal narrative theme of community inclusion can result in. While the anecdote at a glance therefore may seem out of place from the rest of the speech, with its introduction of new people not directly related to Barack Obama's narrative of self, the anecdote actually serves the purpose as a way back to the campaign for Barack Obama. The anecdote moves the speech away from the issue of racial conflict and beyond it through the identification established between Ashley and the older African American man, an identification that is enabled by the setting of the campaign office.

When regarding the anecdote about Ashley in relation to Barack Obama as a narrator and his narrative of self, which he established in earlier speeches⁷² and through his memoir, the setting of the anecdote becomes important. The setting relates to the community meetings of Barack Obama's work in Chicago, where Barack Obama in the memoir learned to listen to other people's stories as well as share his own story. Through this storytelling he found the communal identity he had been searching for. For Barack Obama, the memoir's depiction of the meeting between people through the telling of their stories was perhaps the strongest connection to a community he experiences, at one point describing it as a religious experience through a parallel to a description of a sermon by Jeremiah Wright. The anecdote is part of Barack Obama's personal narrative theme of

⁷² In his *Announcement* speech in Illinois in 2007, Obama also references his work in Chicago and connects his candidature with his narrative of self and the need to treasure the communities in America: "That's the journey we're on today. But let me tell you how I came to be here. As most of you know, I'm not a native of this great state. I moved to Illinois over two decades ago. I was a young man then, just a year out of college. I knew no one in Chicago when I arrived, was without money or family connections. But a group of churches had offered me a job as a community organizer for the grand sum of 13,000 dollars a year. And I accepted the job, sight unseen, motivated then by a single, simple powerful idea, that I might play a small part in building a better America... My work took me to some of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. I joined with pastors and laypeople to deal with communities that had been ravaged by plant closings." (Obama, 2007)

the importance of communal storytelling in order to understand the connections that bind people together in spite of apparent differences.

A Personal History of the United States

The other well-known and interesting anecdotal narrative to bring forth from the speeches covered here is the anecdote about Anne Nixon Cooper in the *Election Night Victory* speech Barack Obama gave on the eve of the 2008 presidential election. This anecdote is used to illustrate a historic narrative that uses the major conflicts for the U.S. in the 20th century as a frame of reference to show how the United States has moved forward on issues of race and gender in particular. While Barack Obama had spoken of these issues many times before, the anecdote helped make the historic references more poignant, because they were given as if they had been witnessed by one single person, the 106-year-old African American woman Ann Nixon Cooper. Barack Obama initially sets up the anecdote by pointing out that the 2008 election in itself has many stories that could be told. He, however, has decided on a particular one. The age of Ann Nixon Cooper is used to both point out why she deserves to be singled out, but it also allows Barack Obama to connect the present with a past that could seem mythical to the many young voters in the present: “She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons: because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.” (Chicago, 2008)

The plot of the anecdote in this way begins even before Cooper was born, in a past that is not directly experienced even by the elderly protagonist, but by the generation that raised her. Then Barack Obama begins to move through the century and references both the setbacks and triumphs throughout. Yet he punctuates each reference with the slogan of the 2008 campaign: “Yes we can”. But here it has become “that American creed.” In this way, Barack Obama solidifies the historic nature of his campaign, not only in the euphoric moment of the present, but by anchoring the campaign and its words to the words spoken by Americans in challenging situations throughout the 20th century:

“When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs, a new sense of common purpose: Yes we can. When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved: Yes we can. She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and

a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "we shall overcome": Yes we can
And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because
after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows
how America can change: Yes we can." (Chicago, 2008)

Here Barack Obama places Anne Nixon Cooper as a witness to both history and the words of national figures such as President Franklin Roosevelt and Martin Luther King without mentioning their names. Their words are known to the audience. While Anne Nixon Cooper watches the nation rise together to meet the threats as a nation, generation or people, she is not merely a witness. Anne Nixon Cooper is made an active participant through her vote, which makes her a person to emulate and not only admire for the audience to the speech.

Finally Barack Obama moves from the present and towards the future: "America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see?" (Chicago, 2008) With this final move, Barack Obama returns to the audience at hand and makes them the protagonists of his speech again, after having handed over this role to Ann Nixon Cooper. He even incorporates his own daughters into his personal narrative theme of generational progress. The anecdote is therefore both national and personal in its meaning. It also fulfills the closing off of the narrative of the 2008 campaign necessary for election night, and serves as a transition from one narrative, that of the campaign, to another narrative, that of the presidency of Barack Obama. Yet this new narrative is not spoken of directly in the anecdote. This also shows the challenge of Barack Obama's personal narrative themes during the election in 2008.

In their content they were highly focused on getting Barack Obama to the White House and the significance of this event in itself due to his background. The entry points to Barack Obama as a narrator came in these descriptions of U.S history up to the point of the 2008 election. He succeeded to such a degree with these narrative themes that left his audience 'satisfied' and in need of a new narrative direction post-election, which we will consider in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Focusing on the narrative elements in a narrative of self in the writings and speeches of a politician can tell us a number of things about the politician's rhetoric. For Barack Obama we have found that he emphasizes specific narrative themes such as an inclusion of different identities,

as well as an open approach to the use of narration itself, both as a literary device as well as a political one, in terms of recognizing the subjectivity of the use of narratives. The narrative themes established in the memoir also resonate through the speeches of Barack Obama's early period as a speaker on the national stage. Barack Obama for instance uses his family's story as much as his own life experiences to establish his narrative self. This use of past generations both speaks to a theme of generational progress in the United States, but also to the communal sense of identity, which the memoir also dealt with in great detail. Barack Obama's use of the elements of narrative such as character, setting, and events were used in the memoir to draw parallels across long geographic distances. In this description of his perceptions of different nations, Barack Obama emphasized a gradual understanding of communality rather than cultural differences. The characters of his family in particular were also used to exemplify the themes of the memoir, such as the dangers of relying too much on one self rather than the support of the community, which Barack Obama's African father became a victim of.

The reflection on the narration process itself was not as prevalent in the speeches as it was in the memoir. The nuances of the characters and the settings of Barack Obama's life are also not recreated with the same degree of detail in the speeches. This, however, should also be seen as a matter of genre, where a political speech has much less time to flesh out narrative elements than a biography. Yet the origins of the characters and the settings in the memoir allow the audience to seek out more detailed information on these narrative elements used by Barack Obama and in this way better understand the references made by Barack Obama. In this way the memoir still informs the narratives presented by Barack Obama in his speeches as a politician.

What did translate from the memoir into the speeches was Barack Obama's emphasis on communal definition and the value of the process of storytelling for not only the community, but also the individual. Traditional narratives of personal struggles and life-long quests often focus on the protagonist reaching a greater level of self-perception – "a discovery of their essential selves". In the memoir and the speeches Barack Obama discovered this self in a communal setting and through communal storytelling. In this way "there is not an essential self, but many selves" to be found in his narrative according to rhetorical scholar John Murphy (Murphy, personal communication, 2014). Why this particular multivalent identity is important for Barack Obama as a narrator-in-chief is what we will turn to next, as we consider more closely the audience, whom the speaker is seeking the chance to both define and speak for.

Chapter 5. The Unlikely Americans: Barack Obama's Narrative of the People

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on Barack Obama's approach to his narrative of self in his memoir and early speeches as candidate for the U.S. presidency, and how he eventually combined this with narratives on national issues such as racial conflict. This chapter focuses on a discussion of how President Obama sought to establish an audience of 'the American people' in his presidential speeches once he was in office. As President, the presidential narrative themes of self, people and nation gain further resonance for the speaker, as he steps into the context of previous presidents' approaches to the themes. As the first African American president, Barack Obama had to both emphasize these presidential traditions to prove his ability to connect with the traditions established by previous presidents, and maintain a strong link to his personal narrative themes due to his campaign's focus on his person and the unique nature of his election to the White House. While Barack Obama claimed to speak for the American people in his campaign, as president he would have the actual position to do this. As president his narrative of the people focused on the people as citizens as much as voters. This chapter seeks to focus on this narrative of the people, while showing how the theme is connected with the narrative themes of the self, and the nation.

As a presidential narrative theme, the narrative of the people relates to the theories on national identities and constitutive rhetoric, as presented through different concepts by researchers such as Maurice Charland in his article "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois," (1987), Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (2006 ed.) and Michael McGee in his article "In Search of 'A People': A Rhetorical Alternative" (1975). Their references to narrative as a term in their theories will be used to establish a connection between the narrative of the people and constitutive rhetoric in particular. Furthermore, the relationship between presidential rhetoric and constitutive rhetoric will also be presented through Vanessa Beasley's publication *You, the People – American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (2004). The historic findings of Beasley's research will be used as a foundation to compare previous U.S. presidents' use of constitutive rhetoric with Barack Obama's speeches regarding the same issues of public identity for the American people. The rhetorical criticism of the narratives found in the speeches of Barack Obama concerning the narrative of the people will show how he as President differs from previous presidents, yet also that he maintained the ceremonial traditions of the presidency. President

Obama's balancing act between speaking as the first African American man in the White House as well entering into the traditions of the presidency are explored in his emphasis on three issues: immigration, race, and civil rights for homosexuals. These issues represent different groups of Americans that have been 'excluded' from the 'American people' as described by previous presidents in similar speech situations.

In various ways these issues, and the groups of Americans they represent, are incorporated more clearly than previously into the narrative of the people in President Obama's speeches. With this incorporation of new groups of Americans in some of the most traditional presidential speeches, such as the inaugural address and the State of the Union, President Obama shows a willingness to address the challenges facing the United States due to its diverse population. It was a diversity that also helped him get reelected in 2012. The thematic focus on these issues also adheres to his personal narrative theme of community inclusion. Yet President Obama also falters in different ways in this inclusion process. Perhaps the most politically problematic aspect being that he finds increasingly less room for his political opposition in his definition of the narrative of the people, in favor of emphasizing progressive values, and voters who share these values with his presidency.

Traditional Presidential Speeches

The speeches focused on in this chapter are President Obama's Inaugural addresses in 2009 and 2013, as well as five of his State of the Union addresses from 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. These speeches are traditional presidential speeches, in the sense that they are speeches all modern presidents must give and know they will give during their administration period. As speech genres they contain elements that lend themselves to constitutive rhetoric, such as "the rehearsing of common values" (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008, pp. 36-39) in the Inaugural address and the "meditation element" (p. 151) in State of the Union speeches aimed at creating an "ethos or national character." (p. 140) The epideictic elements of these speeches offers the President the chance to present a broader view of national issues of identity, rather than solely focusing on more specific issues or policies, and through this view establish a narrative of the people. The two genres in focus have also been chosen to better link the rhetoric of Barack Obama with the rhetoric of previous presidents, which Vanessa Beasley focused on in her work with similar issues of constitutive rhetoric. Beasley chose to work with these particular kinds of speeches because their content did not directly address specific issues, such as race and immigration, but rather presented a broader image of the United States at the times they were given (Beasley, 2004, p. 14).

Narrative of the People and Constitutive Rhetoric

The rhetorical approach to describing a nation's people is part of what is termed as constitutive rhetoric. Several scholars have written about the term since James Boyd White and Maurice Charland introduced it. Charland used the concept in his description of the Canadian Quebecois to discuss the concept of audience, and how audience is created as a collective identity for national groups through constitutive rhetoric. Drawing on the ideas of Kenneth Burke to address the establishment of social identities, Charland speaks of rhetoric as a way of pronouncing an already existing identity. Yet the pronunciation of said identity is still essential in order to bring it into existence for the people. By addressing and giving a name to the Quebecois in Canada, their cause and identity as a *peuple* was established, or constituted through rhetoric. The emphasis in this process was first on finding and establishing a common identity, and then appealing to this identity to persuade the audience. If we consider this in terms of presidential rhetoric, the U.S. president can give voice to an identity for the American people as he envisions them. He can do so by searching the history of the nation and previous statements on the people, and communicate the values found in these texts through the speeches he gives at a national level.

Charland's description of constitutive rhetoric benefits the intention with this dissertation in another way as well: "This constitutive rhetoric took the form of a narrative account of the Quebec history in which Quebecois were identified with their forebears..." (Charland, 1987, p. 135) Here Charland connects the constitutive process to that of editing a narrative structure, through which links between generations of people are established. Through historic references to past generations a modern group of people can be given a viable shared identity. We have already seen Barack Obama do this with his narrative of self, where he referenced both the history of his family as well as that of the United States to give credence to his own speaker position in the present. The narrative form itself aids this process of establishing coherence between the generations and the people of a nation according to Charland: "The narrative form provides continuity across time in which the practices of the past are increasingly identified with the present day order..." (p. 145) The narrative ability to draw historic moments together in a convoluted time frame allows a believable link between past and present generations.

For Charland the narration of the generational background for the modern day Quebecois and their ancestors' historic struggle helped the present generation define themselves as well. With the Quebecois, Charland sought to describe how this process of audience identification

with an image of a shared identity occurred – and eventually lead to a political movement (Charland, 1987, p. 134). In similar narrative fashion, we will see that President Obama uses U.S. history and past generations of Americans to define the present American generation with the goal of establishing a specific political entity – as other presidents have done before him. Yet as we shall see, President Obama decides to focus on different historic events than previous presidents, and is more detailed and personal in his descriptions of problems than for instance President Clinton was in his inaugural addresses on the issue of diversity.

Charland's concept of constitutive rhetoric is relevant for this dissertation's focus on narrative rhetoric because constitutive rhetoric enables an analysis of how a speaker can identify a collective identity and create this identity for a larger group of people through the use of text. In Charland's case the text was a "white paper" written to the people of Quebec. In the case of presidential rhetoric, the text becomes the narratives told in the speeches given by the current president. These narratives of the people are both influenced by the individual president's views and personal background, as well as the long tradition of speaking for and about the American people in the speeches of the U.S. presidency.

In this construction of a narrative of the people, the past becomes a valuable source in the shaping of the narrative for the present to follow: The president uses direct references to history, reiterates specific unchanging values of the American people, as well as addresses the crises of the present through a discussion of the identity of both the people and the government that serves them. For presidents the conclusion is often found in a description of an unfinished project for the United States that continues to evolve. This open-endedness is also something Charland comments on in his description of the Quebecois. "In other words, while classical narratives have an ending, constitutive rhetoric leaves the task of narrative closure to their constituted subjects." (p. 143) Here Charland points out what was also discussed in the chapter on narrative rhetoric; that the use of narratives in a political frame alters the resolution aspect of narratives, since the ending has to be found outside of the text with the audience themselves. While the narrative may be open-ended, it still requires personal and presidential themes at local and global levels throughout to create narrative coherence for the listener, to borrow Fisher's term. This coherence is often achieved by presidents through the description of national values that draw upon certain *topoi* of the national identity.

In the case of the Quebecois, Charland describes the coherence in the terms of an unchanging characteristic to the people: "Individual subjects, the Quebecois, and their collective

subject, the people, are somehow the same, even though the actual personages, institutions, material conditions, and struggles have changed.” (Charland, 1987, p. 144) This is also a valuable point to make when discussing the use of narrative rhetoric for a president such as Barack Obama in his attempt to establish the “we” of the American people through his narratives. President Obama creates the connection to previous generations of Americans by pointing out certain attributes that have not changed over time, values that are old and should remain true for Americans even as they face new challenges. He does this by adhering to the traditions of the presidency and by using the epideictic elements of the speech genres of the State of the Union and Inaugural address.

Presidents before Barack Obama have also used constitutive rhetoric in this way. In his article “Lyndon B. Johnson, “We Shall Overcome” (15 March 1965)”, Garth Pauley, for instance, writes in connection with his study of the LBJ speech: “Stories are an especially significant form of communication, as they can help us make sense of the world and often contain moral lessons that point to an appropriate course of action. They contain a logic, or narrative reasoning, that frames our decision-making in situations similar to those depicted in story.” (Pauley, 2008, p. 25) The framing ability of a narrative is what appeals to politicians such as Presidents Johnson, according to Pauley. It is a way of bringing a diverse audience together and structuring the rhetoric not only through clarifying and logical terms, but also by making the narrative of the people a question of values and moral issues – of making the right choice when posed with the conflict of a narrative plot. Pauley continues: “In the political sphere, stories shape a people’s collective sense of self, their national identity, by telling and retelling their past, present and future.” This resembles Charland’s idea of narrative as part of constitutive rhetoric, as he describes it: “In the telling of the story of a people, a people comes to be. It is within the formal structure of a narrative history that it is possible to conceive of a set of individuals as if they were but one.” (Charland, 1987, p. 140) Because the audience accepts the collapsing temporal aspect of the narration of a narrative, narrative rhetoric is also accepted as a way to assemble a people into being – across communities and even across generations.

The president’s role in constituting the people exists because of “... the reliance of Americans on their president to show them how to be American. More than simply convincing Americans of any particular policy’s efficacy, presidents are charged with showing them how to hold an American identity and what identity to hold.” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 51) Yet the president must create not only allegiance but identification with the national institutions that his presidency is part of “...to find a way for citizens to accept that those institutions are actual

extensions of themselves.” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 52) This is also why epideictic speeches and constitutive rhetoric are an important part of presidential rhetoric, and narratives play a part in achieving the intention with these types of speeches.

Ideal vs. Reality in the Narrative of the People

The identity of the people along with the identity of the president is an essential part of presidential rhetoric, as was discussed in the chapter on presidential rhetoric. Scholars working with constitutive rhetoric, approach the rhetoric of presidents with a similar emphasis on how the presidents speak of the people. Vanessa Beasley for instance describes the identity of the people presented in the speeches of presidents as an “American national identity” (Beasley, 2004, p. 16). This identity stems as much from an abstract concept, as actual ties between people in society. As Beasley states it: “For the American people to persist, there must be something that they think they have in common, and in the absence of any shared race, religion, heritage, or even (sometimes) language, the only things that would seem to be left are indeed ideas and the rhetoric used to explain them.” (Beasley, 2004, p. 45) This approach to an identity of the people relates to Charland’s description of constitutive rhetoric as calling upon a shared identity, and establishing this identity by speaking of it. Another scholar, Michael McGee, has also considered the concept of the people’s identity as constituted by an idea. In the article “In search of ‘the people’: A rhetorical alternative” (1975) McGee sees the identity of a people as removed from reality when looking at the means of describing a people: “... such concepts as “The people” may be strictly linguistic phenomena introduced into public argument as a means of “legitimizing” a collective fantasy.” (McGee, 1975, p. 239) What McGee suggests with the use of the word fantasy is to see the description of the people as both trapped in the text as well as free in the association with the broader population that is described. The fantasy presented in the speech shows an *image* of who they are or can be. ‘The people’ are in this way not objectively real but an ideal fantasy created by the writer or speaker, who creates the “rhetorical fiction.” (p. 240)

These different approaches to the invocation of an identity of a people should be seen in parallel to the idea of establishing a narrative of the people, which draws together different groups of Americans in an idealized version of the people based on linking the present people to a specific past through events and characters. The audience knows the national identity is a creation at heart, but they still accept the idealized identity as a guiding principle in order to understand the connection between the individual and the nation. The ‘revelation’ that it would be impossible to

describe a narrative that incorporates an entire nation and its 300 million different people, allows for an acceptance of the fact that it is an ideal or an imagined version – a vision – of this people that is described through narrative. For the United States this becomes even more poignant when considering different scholars’ opinions on the role of this definition of the people and the role narrative plays in it. Shawn Parry-Giles for instance has said that “... the “people” have always been in crisis even at the founding of the nation, which explains the need for definition throughout its history and through crises such as the Civil War. Contemporary times always seem worse, yet the fight over who the people are has always been there, as an ongoing process of definition.” (Parry-Giles, 2013, RSA Summer Institute) Christian Salmon, the outspoken critic of developments in storytelling, even suggests that the history of the United States furthers the nation’s adherence to such defining narratives: “It was a country where anything was possible. Everyone could write their story on a blank page and start a new life. It was both a nation and a narration.” (Salmon, 2010, p. 5) Particularly the final sentence points to the often referenced issue in academic studies, that the United States was built on an idea, and that this in some ways separates it from other nation, and often forms the basis for the idea of “American exceptionalism”, as we saw in the chapter on the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric.

According to McGee this acceptance of the fiction, or narrative of the people, has been achieved by a number of historic leaders⁷³ who have been able to both find the words and causes to move people, through the iteration of *a* people. Like Charland, McGee argues that the identity of the people should be found in past events, as McGee phrases it: “This... necessarily involves a search of the nation’s history.” (McGee, 1975, p. 240) In this search, a political myth is created that the people first accept outside their own reality. But once the myth has been established, the leader can move ‘the people’ towards objective reality. Here McGee differs from Charland, since the identity of the people is not something that already exists for McGee, but something that is brought into existence by its iteration. The success of this move from fantasy to believed reality is very much about timing, and an understanding of the current political context. Through what McGee calls a “cultural rhythm” (p. 246), shifts occur within society over time. Shifts that politicians and leaders can attempt to move along with and establish the prevailing myth that appeals to the people

⁷³ McGee gives several examples of leaders who have been able to redefine reality through political myth for their people, such as Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt (McGee, 1975, p. 244).

through an adherence to *kairos*, a sense of timing on when to announce specific opinions or policies⁷⁴.

Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor, Your Huddled Masses...

The presidential speeches analyzed by Vanessa Beasley in *You, the People* reveal an exclusion of certain groups, such as immigrants, Native and African Americans, and women. This contradicts the ideal purpose of the constitution of the people by the presidents. Yet the exclusion of certain groups by the inclusion of other groups has been an ongoing practice in presidential rhetoric, according to Beasley. Another scholar who recognizes this inherent problem in constitutive rhetoric is Bonnie Dow, who argues that it is a great challenge to "...bring trustful coherence out of division without erasing or suppressing difference." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 237)

Beasley begins her analyses of presidential speeches during the heyday of immigration to the United States at the end of the 19th century. In response to the wave of immigrants, it became important for presidents to describe the new world that the United States represented for the newcomers to the continent. The goal was to enable the new citizens to leave their old world behind politically (Beasley, 2004, p. 60), and become part of the larger idea of The United States instead by giving up their national past and identity.

This idea of a nation was seen as a way to link the American citizens together in spite of their differences in origin. The presidents' words became important in articulating this shared belief. Throughout her research Beasley emphasizes the concept of a "shared belief hypothesis", where the national identity of Americans is based on an *idea* of the nation, resembling the concepts of collective fantasy and constitutive rhetoric of McGee and Charland respectively. The hypothesis plays an important part in establishing an idealized version of a shared national identity, which presidents address in their speeches. (Beasley, 2004, p. 44) What Beasley suggests with this approach to the presidents' description of the people, is that presidents present a strategic version of history that has ended up creating a contrast between the ideal and reality (p. 18). In this way Beasley also suggests that the past is mined for this identity project. This has established an active relationship to the past in U.S. politics, which this dissertation would argue is also part of what has

⁷⁴ President Obama has - through his own campaign and through proxies such as his vice president - tuned in to the national conversation on identity issues such as marriage rights for homosexuals, and changed his rhetoric accordingly. Obama has used his leadership position not only to influence the national conversation on the narrative of the people, he has also adapted it accordingly, as we will see with particularly his second inaugural address.

created the need and use of narratives in presidential rhetoric, since the narratives just as often deal with the past as with the present.

The challenge for the presidents in their description of the people was to describe an 'us' without creating a 'them' in contrast, a challenge which Dow's comment above also points to. It is also a challenge which the presidential rhetoric analyzed in Beasley's project has failed to meet, particularly when attempting to hold together as diverse a nation as the United States (Beasley, 2004, p. 14). In order to create an image of one united people, differences that did not fit the profile had to be blotched out, and speaking of "individual difference has been largely verboten in this type of presidential rhetoric of national identity." (p. 63) The problem with this contrast between the idealized nation and the reality for its people is, according to Beasley, that certain groups have been excluded from what has been defined as true Americans.

A contemporary scholar who shares Beasley's worry of rhetoric that includes through exclusion is Kristen Hoerl. In her article "Selective amnesia and racial transcendence in news coverage of President Obama's inauguration" (2012), Hoerl criticizes what she describes as "transcendence" in the coverage of the event of Barack Obama's inauguration. The term "transcendence" refers to the process where one moves beyond the problems of the past: "I contend that selective amnesia was fundamental to the construction of the myth of racial transcendence." (Hoerl, 2012, p. 182) We will discuss Hoerl's arguments in detail later in this chapter, yet it is relevant to reference her argument on Barack Obama here, since her critique of the media coverage of Barack Obama's inaugural resembles Beasley critique of previous presidents' rhetoric. Hoerl also connects the problematic rhetoric of the media to the concept of narrative, since the historic omissions were what "...enabled the construction of a seamless narrative that reaches its conclusion in Obama's election." (p. 182) This critique of narrative relates to Salmon's view of storytelling, where the narrative approach to history, according to Hoerl, enables the smoothing over of problematic issues and edits out that which cannot be explained. Yet while Hoerl uses a speaking situation with Barack Obama as an example of this kind of national "selective amnesia" (p. 181), Hoerl mixes up the media's response with Barack Obama's rhetoric and fails to recognize the changes President Obama *does* introduce to the rhetoric of the inaugural address tradition, when speaking of the diversity in the American population.

The Absence of Immigrants, Native and African Americans, and Women in Presidential Rhetoric

This dissertation will mainly focus on Barack Obama's description of issues such as immigration, race, and civil rights for homosexuals and how constitutive rhetoric aids groups affected by these issues. It is, however, relevant to briefly cover the groups described in Beasley's work, which have been excluded from the identity of the American people by previous presidents, because of the different kinds of exclusions these groups have experienced. These exclusionary tactics relate in their content to Barack Obama's rhetoric as president, even when he speaks of other excluded groups than those covered by Beasley.

The negative repercussion of the rising tide of immigration up through the 1880s and 1890s was an increase in bigotry and nativism in the United States (Beasley, 2004, pp. 69-70). The paradox in this hostility towards immigrants in the United States seems somewhat clear, since most Americans at the time were essentially immigrants themselves and the narrative of immigration is a near sacred part of U.S. history (Beasley, 2004, p. 71). It is also a *topoi* often used by U.S. presidents describing the narrative of the people, where the many different histories of people coming to the shores of America are used as examples of progress for the nation. Yet immigrants in the late 19th-century and early 20th-century period were described by presidents of the time as lacking something fundamental in their character for them to grasp the idea of the United States. This represented a problem, since adherence to the idea of the United States was essential in becoming a true American citizen, according to the shared belief hypothesis. Rather than simply having a different background, the immigrants also *thought* differently (Beasley, 2004, pp. 76-80). The discussion on how to deal with immigrants in the United States has continued throughout the 20th century and up until today, where issues such as border control, illegal immigrants, and the children of illegal immigrants who have grown up in the States all fill up the political agenda⁷⁵. Immigration reform has become an even more prevalent political issue after the 2012 presidential election, where President Obama as the first candidate ever won the presidential election without getting the majority of white votes.

The Native American's place in American society is essentially described, according to Beasley, as an "American Burden" by the presidents – which could be described as a parallel to Rudyard Kipling's concept of the White Man's Burden⁷⁶. Unlike immigrants, Native Americans

⁷⁵ See for instance the debate in the U.S. congress on "The Dream Act".

⁷⁶ "The White Man's Burden" is the title of a poem published by Rudyard Kipling in 1899, which describes the duty of Western Society in the role of colonizers. While the poem also contains warnings on the practices of colonization, the

were not seen as being able to transcend their past to become Americans (Beasley, 2004, p. 99). President Grover Cleveland⁷⁷ suggested that Americans instead had to teach *their* ways to the Indians (p. 101). Essentially, the White American's belief in individualism was forced upon the Native Americans with the excuse of making them true U.S. citizens. But presidents throughout the early period, which Beasley studies, did not give voice to any problems caused *for* the Native Americans by the United States. Rather, it was the problems the Native Americans posed for the United States that were addressed in presidential rhetoric. In a similar fashion, African Americans were not described as part of the American national identity and what it meant to be an American. Due to the still fresh memories of the Civil War, African Americans were mentioned even less than the Native Americans in the speeches of the presidents at the turn of the century, between the 19th and 20th century, according to Beasley. Instead, U.S. law was given the responsibility to change the problematic issues facing this group of Americans in the United States (p. 107). Neither the president nor the people were asked to take action on the issue. In this way no responsibility was placed on the individual American to consider the relationship to these groups of Americans, and the government was left alone to deal with issues for minorities in the United States (p. 115). After the Civil Rights Movement's heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship with race issues has become even more problematic. President Ronald Reagan, for instance, stated that there no longer was a racial problem in the United States (p. 117). This argument continues today as we saw with Hoerl's argument in connection with the media coverage of Barack Obama's inaugural, as well as some of the writers on Barack Obama who present the election of Barack Obama as an end to racism. In the controversial bestseller book *The Roots of Obama's Rage* Dinesh D'Souza for instance argues that racism has become episodic rather than systemic (D'Souza, 2011⁷⁸). While a book such as D'Souza's may be seen as a fringe argument, in spite of its bestseller status, more central decisions from the U.S. government backs up this view; for instance, the decision in June 2013 by the Supreme Court to revoke the Voting Rights Act of 1965⁷⁹.

Finally, Beasley also studies how women were spoken of in presidential speeches, before and after they gained the vote in 1920. Before this change of their role in political life, women were

poem was, and still is, considered as a representative of a racist view of the relationship between developed and developing countries.

⁷⁷ Grover Cleveland was a Democratic president in the periods of 1885-1889 and 1893-1897.

⁷⁸ See appendix A for a brief critique of D'Souza's book along with a number of other biographies on Barack Obama.

⁷⁹ This law was set up to protect minority voters from discrimination by states' local legislation. The Supreme Court deemed the law no longer necessary in spite of recent efforts by states to hinder voter participation in future elections through increased requirements for voter registration and the time in which people can vote at the polls.

also excluded from the description of fully fledged citizens in the United States, including the rights that followed with citizenship. Yet the women were excluded in a different manner than the other groups described here, according to Beasley. Rather than being ignored or set aside, women were held up as exemplary citizens, as models of virtue and good manners to follow for the men. But because of this position, the argument became that they should not dirty themselves with politics. “True womanhood had nothing to do with voting,” as Beasley describes the sentiment of the time (p. 126). The women were included over time in the description of the citizenry, especially after they received the vote, where, for instance, President Franklin Roosevelt in his 1937 Inaugural Address described both men and women as citizens (p. 140). Yet for a long time after the right to vote was achieved for women, there was a focus on them in terms of how they could be *helped* by the government, rather than describing them as complete citizens at the same level of their male counterparts. This was a parallel to the way Native Americans and African Americans were seen as needing help to gain full citizenship.

The Traditions of the Inaugural and the State of the Union Addresses and a New Way of Speaking of Citizenship

In her work Beasley includes the rhetoric of presidents up until President Bill Clinton in the 1990s, which means that her critique of the lack of focus on the above group of Americans does not include that of Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama. In the analysis of President Barack Obama’s speeches in this chapter we will consider within the issues of immigration, race and civil rights for homosexuals, how the different groups are addressed, with a particular emphasis on African Americans and immigrants. Before we do this, it is worth pointing out that Beasley suggests that President Bill Clinton in some ways was the first president to begin to change presidential rhetoric on these issues of speaking of a shared identity for the American people.

The challenge for presidents is that they are often tied down by the traditions of presidential rhetoric spoken before they reach the Bully Pulpit themselves. It can therefore be difficult for them to break free of the traditional constraints established. Beasley, nonetheless, describes President Clinton as being more honest about facing the challenges of diversity in the U.S. democracy, where President Clinton has put race back on the map seeking a “national dialogue” on the issue (p. 118). In the speeches studied by Beasley, President Clinton even managed to find a personal level to the fight, so he could engage the average American on the issue, something previous presidents had not done. When reading President Clinton’s second inaugural address this becomes evident in passages

such as this: “Along the way, Americans... deepened the wellspring of justice by making a revolution in civil rights for African Americans and all minorities, and extending the circle of citizenship, opportunity and dignity to women.” (Clinton, 1997) In this quotation Clinton mainly references a positive approach to the progress made on issues of civil rights for minorities. Yet in a later part of the second inaugural President Clinton also delves into the problems of the issue of diversity: “The divide of race has been America’s constant curse. And each new wave of immigrants gives new targets to old prejudices... These forces have nearly destroyed our nation in the past. They plague us still... These obsessions cripple both those who hate and, of course, those who are hated, robbing both of what they may become.” (Clinton, 1997) Here Clinton speaks directly to the challenges that have faced the United States national coherence and sense of national identity, because of the continued development of a diverse population, with the problems still there to be faced. But if President Clinton can be said to have opened the dialogue on the issue of race, President Obama has one this issue and others taken a step further by gradually embracing the fact that his very presidency has represented a new identity for not only the presidency, but also for the American people, and thereby offered new opportunities to present a renewed narrative of the people, which in greater detail includes groups that were formerly excluded from the ideal of American citizenship.

Transition from the “Unlikely Candidate” to the President-Elect

The constraints of the presidential speech genres were one issue of the equation that President Obama had to contend with after his election in 2008. Another issue was President Obama’s own campaign rhetoric, which established certain personal narrative themes and connections between his candidacy and U.S. history, as we saw in the previous chapter. While the election victory and the speech following it, with the long anecdote of Ann-Nixon-Cooper, could be seen as closing a chapter on the narrative themes of the campaign, President Obama still had to adhere to these themes in his speeches as president and connect them with the traditional presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation.

In his 2008 election campaign, Barack Obama often used the phrase “An unlikely candidate” to describe his own story and ascent as a candidate to the highest office in the country. Barack Obama also used his personal and diverse background story to reach out to as many Americans’ own backgrounds as possible. Perhaps most importantly, he sought to connect his own story with that of the Civil Rights Movement, as John Murphy pointed out in the article “Barack

Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation” (2011). With this approach to the rhetoric of his campaign Barack Obama managed to create a strong narrative of self that had both personal and national resonance with the voters, and in this way prepared the way for *President* Obama’s narrative of the American people, even before he was in office. The election of Barack Obama in 2008 became the next step in the national dialogue on racial equality, if one was to believe the Obama campaign, both the media (Hoerl, 2012) and the American people seemed to accept this linking of past and present events into a coherent narrative.

In their book *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election*, (2010) Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy and Kathleen Hall Jamieson discuss a number of major issues of the 2008 Democratic and Republican campaigns. The book also deals with the ability of the campaigns to get messages across to voters, especially in terms of priming and framing the discourse, and how this was done through the characters of the candidates. The authors of the book describe this process as a way for the candidates of the two parties to establish competing constructions of reality (Kenski et al., 2010, p. 9) adhering to the ideas of establishing a narrative to constitute an ideal identity of the people and engage them as voters. Barack Obama could in the 2008 election, just by his candidacy alone, stand for a change to the norm and progress, in a way that deeply frustrated both the Clinton and McCain campaign as described in David Remnick’s *The Bridge* (2010). The Clintons felt that “... the press was enamored of Obama and the narrative of an African American candidate beating an entrenched machine.” (Remnick, 2010, p. 492) Voting against Barack Obama became voting against progress, as an aide for Clinton states: “Obama was new and he was hopeful and he projected change. And he had a better narrative. Of course, we thought the narrative was full of shit.” (Remnick, 2010, p. 516) John McCain’s presidential campaign was similarly frustrated by the Obama campaign’s narrative efforts and sought among other things to change the perception of Barack Obama by asking *who* he really was (Remnick, 2010, p. 541). But the great emphasis placed on Barack Obama’s identity by his opponents was actually a benefit for the Obama campaign in 2008. The frustration is described well within the McCain campaign: “... he (Obama) seemed to be ‘trying to get the country to prove something to him and not vice-versa,’” as Salter put it. “For Obama, if the country showed the good sense to elect him, it will have shown itself worthy of the promise it once had because I represent the fulfillment of that promise.” (Remnick, 2010, p. 554) We see here the ability of Barack Obama’s narrative of self to create an almost self-fulfilling arc for the election of 2008, where the election of Barack Obama became the needed progress for the country. The McCain people

perceived themselves as caught up in a great historical narrative, where they themselves were forced to play, if not the villain, then at least the forces standing in the way of progress.

The campaign of 2008 established a certain view of U.S. history for the history enthusiast Barack Obama, with an emphasis on progressive politics and civil protest towards unfair practices against minorities. That he had already spoken out on these issues during his presidential campaign allowed Barack Obama as president to speak on the issues of identity in a different way than his predecessors. Yet his speeches as president, particularly in his first period, were also affected by the political context he gave the speeches in and the constraints he faced as speaker.

Throughout the period, the economic crisis was present in President Obama's speeches and functioned as a deterrent for large scale expansions to government institutions or programs, which an active progressive agenda could have led to. The War against Terror campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan continued to pose questions to the identity of the United States and its role on the international stage. President Obama also needed to address these international issues in the State of the Union addresses. These ongoing crises were used by President Obama to discuss the difference between people in society, not in ethnic terms, but economic terms (for instance, with Wall Street vs. Main Street (Obama, 2010) or by focusing on the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans (Obama, 2012)). The U.S. military also received greater prominence at certain points in the speeches, as president Obama became more invested in the role of Commander-in-Chief than he had been as a candidate.

In spite of these larger economic and national security issues, or sometimes even aided by them, there are still many examples in the speeches throughout President Obama's first years as president, where he addresses the issues discussed by Beasley in ways that differ from earlier presidents, and follows up on the words of President Clinton by referencing the minorities in greater detail. Essentially, President Obama seeks the moments that focus on differences to better understand the national identity: "Obama's success as president would depend on his attitude and inclination toward using our divisions to sharpen our understanding of our identifications..." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 56) Rather President Obama often sought to conspire to a shared identity through action of the people, for instance in participation in his presidential campaign. In this way he also took up the challenge posed by Bonnie Dow on the difficulty of addressing diversity without eliminating it along the way (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014). The following section will focus on how President Obama addressed the narrative of the people post-election.

Barack Obama's Inaugural Addresses and State of the Union speeches

A Narrative Theme of Traditional Values Drawn from History

President Obama is a historically conscious speaker, just as aware of the role of the presidency in a situation as he is of what he himself as a person represents when speaking as president. This corresponds with his role as narrator from the memoir, where he also emphasized the knowledge of history as an important personal narrative theme. As a presidential speaker, Barack Obama often references the historical significance of the 'speech situation' at the beginning of his speeches, rather than give an example of his own relation to an issue for instance. With these historic references he consciously adheres to the traditions of the presidency. Yet President Obama still manages to incorporate contemporary progressive views into the history he is narrating. This is evident in the way President Obama describes traditional U.S. values as still playing a role in the challenges of modern society. In his first Inaugural address in 2009, President Obama focuses on what he describes as traditional values and the importance of remaining faithful to the ideals of the nation (Inaugural 1st, 2009). President Obama describes the character that holds Americans together as "Our celebration of initiative and enterprise, our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, these are constants in our character." (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) The values of Americans and their ideals are even made personal for President Obama as he describes how the American ideals reach across the world, even "to the small village where my father was born." (Inaugural 1st, 2009) The important thing to note here, however, is how these values relate to a modern world according to President Obama. "Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends -- honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism -- these things are old." (Inaugural 1st, 2009) A message he repeats in his second inaugural: "But while the means will change, our purpose endures." (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) There may be new challenges for the United States, but they can be met with values that have always been there.

In this description of what it means to be an American, President Obama adheres to the constitutive rhetoric of previous presidents described by Beasley. The difference from previous presidents is in *who* President Obama chooses to include in this traditional description of the American people; how they live up to the ideals of being an American citizen; and what role they have played in U.S. history.

President Obama also adheres to traditional presidential rhetoric by focusing on unity in spite of the differences in the U.S. population. This is something other presidents have done before him, and

something that Beasley criticized some presidents for doing at the cost of overlooking the troubles that these differences have caused within the United States. President Obama at several times calls for unity in spite of division and the need to "move forward as one nation, and one people" (SOTU, 2010). In a later speech he becomes more specific and describes the national unity through one of his most often used metaphors: the United States as a family: "We are part of the American family. We believe that in a country where every race and faith and point of view can be found, we are still bound together as one people; that we share common hopes and a common creed; that the dreams of a little girl in Tucson are not so different than those of our own children, and that they all deserve the chance to be fulfilled." (SOTU, 2011) The dream or idea of America is universal and is what ties the American population together, and allows them to see the bond that holds the nation together.

In the above quote, one could say that President Obama is not speaking more openly about differences than his predecessors, and perhaps President Obama is even downplaying the differences, as presidents have done before him. But that President Obama is using the metaphor of the family also suggests that he acknowledges differences among a people who share commonalities, while still allowing them to retain their personal differences. Passion may have strained, yet it will not break the bonds of affection amongst the family members, to paraphrase President Abraham Lincoln.

Giving Voice and Body to Slaves in the Immigrant Narrative

President Obama adheres to the constitutive traditions of presidential rhetoric criticized by Beasley, through his historic references to common held values and the idea of unity in the American population. Yet he also gives voice to groups previously portrayed in problematic ways in the traditional speeches of the State of the Union and Inaugural Address. President Obama makes deliberate use of historic references to bring in the groups Beasley found to be excluded by previous presidents, so that these groups become a part of the narrative of people in the United States.

For the group of African Americans the most significant example of this is in President Obama's first inaugural address from 2009, where he uses a narrative spark to describe the generations who have worked for progress in the United States: "For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth." (Inaugural 1st, 2009) With the "lash of the whip" President Obama incorporates the slave into the narrative of the American immigrant, which suggests that anyone who came to America's shores, voluntarily or

involuntarily, deserves gratitude from the current generations and a place in the narrative of people in the United States.

In this way, President Obama addresses diversity in the United States in a way that Beasley has seen missing from past presidents' speeches. President Obama also addresses Hoerl's critique of the media's 'forgetting' of the past where "selective amnesia" represents "Consistent patterns of discourse that ignore significant events in the history of social and political struggle [which] create an impoverished discursive landscape by depleting rhetorical resources for shared reasoning about public policy, national identity, and social justice." (Hoerl, 2012, p. 181) Rather than a forgetting of African American hardship during the years of slavery, or a separation of them from the rest of the American population through the sin of slavery, Barack Obama tries to include the slave into the narrative of the people and give them a place and voice in this narrative. In the case of his rhetoric, President Obama, in both his inaugurals, attempts to establish a broader discursive landscape, rather than a 'starved arena'. The landscape gives room for other voices than the previously dominant ones in the narrative of the people.

The interesting perspective on this "discursive landscape" of Barack Obama, and what we will see as both a strength and weakness for President Obama, is that he brings in both the good and bad sides of U.S. history to establish the narrative of the people. Often inspired by President Lincoln, President Obama uses the darker sides of U.S. history in a broad narrative arc to argue that the historic trials have actually made the United States stronger: "...because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass..." (Inaugural 1st, 2009) History has taught the American people a lesson, which can be used in the present and still be brought to the rest of the world. Here President Barack Obama resembles President's Clinton's broader approach to the issue of diversity in U.S. society.

A problem for Barack Obama's inclusion of the slave into the narrative of people is that it is made without President Obama actually acknowledging the fundamental difference of immigrating to the U.S. at one's own will or being forced onto the journey. In this way, Hoerl can be said to be partially correct in her critique of President Obama's approach to the history of race in the United States. Yet President Obama can also be adhering to the speech genre of the inaugural address with his first Inaugural, by tying the different groups together across conflicting issues. In this way, Barack Obama follows the tradition established by Thomas Jefferson of political inclusion in the Inaugural. The emphasis in President Obama's first inaugural was still on this unity of the people as

a whole, rather than focusing on certain groups of Americans in the narrative of the people. This would change with the second inaugural, as we shall see.

President Obama followed up the ‘edition’ to the immigrant narrative with a personal narrative spark about his own background when speaking of the positive aspects of the United States, where “... a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred Oath.” (Inaugural 1st, 2009) President Obama here references his own father’s presence in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement and one of the important events of this movement: the sit-ins at counters in Southern States by African American students. With this reference, President Obama uses his own physical presence as an embodiment of progress on the issue of race⁸⁰. He does not have to say it directly in the speech, but simply by giving the Inaugural address, taking the oath, and partaking in the ritual of the inauguration President Obama is changing the ceremony’s meaning for the American people. By speaking as a representative of a minority group, the event of Barack Obama’s inaugural presents the people with a new meaning to the shared values rehearsed in the speech genre.

The Reception of Barack Obama’s History of Racial Issues in the United States

While Barack Obama was criticized for speaking out on the problems of race in the United States, scholars have spoken of precisely this lack of critique during the Obama presidency. Hoerl’s article “Selective Amnesia and Racial Transcendence in News Coverage of President Obama’s Inauguration”, which we have already discussed, critiques the manner in which mainstream media presented an entirely positive view of the question of race during the inauguration, while forgetting ongoing problems as well as more controversial sides of the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King’s status as a radical by contemporary society.

Hoerl’s article in particular is useful to consider, since she pinpoints the problem of a narrative approach in media coverage. Although she states her focus is on the media, she does also incorporate a quote by Barack Obama, and this in a sense undermines the point she wants to make, since Barack Obama himself does and has addressed the present problems with race in America. He has also taken a less ‘idealized’ approach to his view of the history of race in for instance his *A more Perfect Union* speech.

⁸⁰ A simple physical aspect of this is that Barack Obama stands in front of his audience, rather than sitting with his back to them as the protesters did with the sit-ins.

Hoerl's two main concerns are first that MLK was elevated to an icon and thereby became a less contested person than he was seen as in the 1960s. The second concern was whether the United States had actually achieved a post-racial state with the election of President Obama – (again this is not President Obama's point of view, but the media's). The Media connects the dots in history, but ignores the problematic elements in the larger picture. Hoerl brings to light a valid critique of the rhetoric about the election of Barack Obama as the fulfillment of Martin Luther King's Dream stated by both African American pundits and journalists at large. (Hoerl, 2012, p. 183) Was Martin Luther King's dream a black man in the White House, or was it equality on a much larger scale, rather than the individual achievement.

The problem with this fulfillment rhetoric is that it ends the narrative of the Civil Rights Movement and the race strife in the United States. "By depicting Obama's election as the embodiment of civil rights – rather than as an opportunity for public policy on behalf of racial minorities – coverage of the inauguration suggests that protest and dissent on behalf of racial justice is unnecessary." (p. 184) Rather than opening the discussion on race, Barack Obama's election allowed the media to close it according to Hoerl. The media coverage then also acts proactively to dissuade any further protest, because they show the development of the Civil Rights Movement as having a direct line from the early sixties' Martin Luther King to Barack Obama, sidestepping the later MLK and his connection to the burgeoning Black Power movement. This dissertation argues that Barack Obama did not close the discussion in the same way, but he did have some of his own selective amnesia in connection with the inaugural.

Sexual Identity and Civil Rights

Another differing approach President Obama has to minority groups compared to his predecessors is that he applies the narrative link between himself and the Civil Rights Movement from the 2008 presidential campaign to the relationship between the presidency and other minority groups. This allows them to become part of a more basic and broadly based progressive quest, or journey, for rights that are equal to all American Citizens. In his second inaugural President Obama uses specific historic events relevant to women's rights, the Civil Rights Movement and the gay and lesbian movement as narrative sparks: "We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths – that all of us are created equal – is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall" (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) Barack Obama uses the inclusive "we the people" to begin with. He also uses wordings such as "created equal" and

“forebears” to connect the issue to the very founding of the nation. ‘This was what the founding fathers intended’ becomes the subtext, before President Obama references the three moments referring to a congress demanding the vote for women, a brutal, state-sanctioned, beating of peaceful civil rights protestors, and a riot between police and gay men in New York. The moments referred to are ones of resistance, and the groups taking action on their own, rather than being assisted by the government. Barack Obama in this way gives agency to the groups in a way that was seen missing in earlier presidents’ rhetoric as described by Beasley, as well as the broader descriptions of President Clinton.

Even before the progressively themed second inaugural, President Obama had an increasing focus on gay rights, beginning with the military and the “Don’t ask don’t tell rule” installed during the previous democratic administration. While other minorities, such as Native Americans and African Americans, have been asked to prove their loyalty to the United States through military service, President Obama does not ask this of gay soldiers in his rhetoric. Instead he equates them fully with the diverse corps of American soldiers and focuses on their civil right to express their love to whomever they want: “Our troops come from every corner of this country – they’re black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American. They are Christian and Hindu, Jewish and Muslim. And, yes, we know that some of them are gay. Starting this year, no American will be forbidden from serving the country they love because of who they love.” (SOTU, 2011) The following year President Obama again referenced the military in his State of the Union, but this time he used the institution as an image for the United States to follow: “Those of us who have been sent here to serve can learn a thing or two from the service of our troops. When you put on that uniform, it doesn’t matter if you’re black or white; Asian, Latino, Native American; conservative, liberal; rich; poor; gay, straight. When you’re marching into battle, you look out for the person next to you, or the mission fails.” (SOTU, 2012) This again shows how President Obama sought to link the gay rights issue with the narrative arc of other civil rights causes through history, such as the rights for African Americans, and make their causes part of the ongoing narrative of the American People. The issue of civil rights for homosexuals connected with the narrative of people was a way for President Obama to continue his Civil Rights Movement link after the culmination of his own linkage to the movement with the 2008 election victory⁸¹.

⁸¹ Yet the fight over history is also present in the discussion of who can claim the right to the developing political achievements for gay rights in the United States. In her recent book *Forcing the Spring* (2014) author and political advisor Jo Becker describes the recent developments as achieved by the Obama administration, while gay rights

Antagonists in the Narrative of the People

While President Obama in the above examples addresses specific minority groups of Americans in clearer ways than previously seen in these traditional speeches of the presidency, his narrative of people is not solely one of inclusion. Any engaging narrative is in need of an antagonist that can present a human challenge to the protagonist. This antagonist can represent something tangible that can be overcome, rather than abstract concepts or large anonymous institutions⁸². The opponents in President Obama's narrative of the American people are the cynics whose "memories are short" (Inaugural 1st, 2009), since they are not able to remember what has been the fundamental reasons behind the growth of the United States and its ability to influence world affairs. Here President Obama presents a specific view of history, portraying his opponents as misunderstanding history, and thereby they do not understand what is to be done about the problems of the present, nor can they partake in the constitution of the American people's identity, because they do not know the history of the American people. This relates to Barack Obama's personal narrative theme of the importance of knowing one's history in order to understand one's own identity.

As Barack Obama gained the speaker position as president, this understanding of the importance of history gained an even clearer relation to ideas of hegemony and competing views of history. With his understanding of his opponents as either lacking knowledge of history, or misunderstanding history, President Obama partakes in a fight over history, and defines his version of the past as morally superior to his adversaries'. To argue with his narration of historic events then is to be on the wrong side of the debate, rather than allow room for negotiation of the past's meaning for the present. President Obama extends this view to his foreign policy where he argues that the foreign enemies of the US in the world "are on the wrong side of history" as well. (Inaugural 1st, 2009) They have not studied or understood the journey that freedom-seeking people

activists sees the development as based on decades worth of hard and dangerous work. They saw the Obama administration as a hindrance for a long time for developing further rights for homosexuals, because of the administration's fear of an electoral backlash. (See politiken May 6th 2014 – Kristian Madsen – p. 1 Second section: "USA's homoer vejrer forår")

⁸² One example of an antagonist was presented in the light of the economic crisis, where the banks ended up bearing the largest blame for the economic crisis for President Obama. Although in his first inaugural he placed the blame more broadly on the individual Americans as well. "I am not interested in punishing banks," (Obama, SOTU 2010) although they deserve it, President Obama thereby implies. Late in the speech, President Obama also places the blame on a loss of faith in institutions, due to individuals who wreck the image of the rest of the institution. (Obama, SOTU 2010)

in the world are on. Because of this lack of understanding their regimes will not last, according to President Obama⁸³.

President Obama's "We, the people"

In the 2012 election, President Obama was the first candidate who did not win a majority of votes among White Americans while still winning the presidential election. His inaugural speech in 2013 ended up focusing on a constitution of who this new coalition of voters was: "We the people"⁸⁴ is repeated throughout the speech, and President Obama uses it to flesh out who these people were. 'We' in President Obama's second inaugural means to a large extent the various minority groups in American society. They gain their historic identity through President Obama's comparison of their struggle for civil rights with the struggles in the 1950s and '60s, tying them together in a narrative, as he did with his own 2008 candidacy and the Civil Rights Movement. This narrative may sound conciliatory, but in principle it leaves out other groups of voters who did not vote for President Obama in the 2012 election, and President Obama in this way breaks with the tradition of the inaugural address to focus on a wider constitution of the American people, which he adhered more to in his first inaugural.

President Obama's presidency had through President Obama's personal narrative in and of itself been a shift in the traditions of the American presidency, and with his second inaugural speech President Obama also opposed some of the traditions of the speech genre. In the first inaugural, President Obama was focused on the transition of himself from candidate to the US presidency. In the first inaugural, he had to prove that he could step into the tradition of the presidency in spite of the difference he represented with his appearance and his narrative of self. In the second inaugural, the transition in the speech is more focused on the narrative of the people, moving the people from one stage to another. Barack Obama, however, was still an embodiment of this transition. This was an attempt at constitutive rhetoric that not merely reconfirmed a previously existing narrative of the American people. President Obama re-constituted the American people in a new narrative in the second inaugural.

⁸³ This connection between understanding history and the relationship to foreign powers, allies and opponents, will be the focus of the following chapter on the narrative of nation.

⁸⁴ The first words of the U.S. Constitution

Throughout the speeches analyzed here, President Obama manages to turn this definition of an imagined community based on an idea, into a bridge *between* the ideal and reality of a people, rather than only speaking of one or the other. He attempts to engage the American people to make sense of these shared ideas in one's own life: "That is our generation's task: to make these words, these rights, these values of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness real for every American. Being true to our founding documents does not require us to agree on every contour of life. It does not mean we all define liberty in exactly the same way or follow the same precise path to happiness. Progress does not compel us to settle centuries-long debates about the role of government for all time, but it does require us to act in our time." (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) Here President Obama does engage the oppositional views present in U.S. politics, and he acknowledges that they may not be solved. Yet he does suggest one method to deal with them, and that is through the individual taking action in their own life, and thereby become part of the greater American experiment: "Today we continue a never ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time." (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) Here President Obama speaks directly to the relationship between the idealized image of the American people, and the reality that needs to be dealt with, which previous presidents have not been able to do, according to Beasley.

President Obama connects this debate and the questions of what to do about the challenges to the metaphor of the journey throughout the speeches. This connects to his personal narrative theme of a perpetually changing relationship to identity, an ongoing evolutionary process in an acknowledgement that the United States is not a perfect nation but is undergoing a process leading towards this goal. President Obama ends one speech in the following way: "A new decade stretches before us. We don't quit. I don't quit. Let's seize this moment – to start anew, to carry the dream forward, and to strengthen our union once more." (SOTU, 2010) It fits well with his description not only of his campaign but also of his resulting view of America as an unfinished project that continues to be worked on every day, not only by the presidency and the government, but by the people themselves. President Obama ends other speeches in similar fashion. Except for the Second Inaugural, he ends all of the speeches considered here with mentioning the journey that pushes the United States forward. However in the Second Inaugural President Obama instead uses the phrase "Our journey is not complete" five times in an anaphora to underline that America is still in progress on issues concerning minority groups. The journey is incomplete until historic wrongs that are similar to slavery are dealt with. (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) President Obama then provides another important point on establishing a narrative of the people: "We must act, knowing that our work will

be imperfect.” (Inaugural 2nd, 2013) While there is not even certainty that the work will lead to the result envisioned, it must be tried nonetheless. And in this call for action President Obama differs from his predecessors as described in the work of Vanessa Beasley. It also engages the audience in the narrative arc of President Obama’s themes in ways that leave the next chapter of the narrative in the hands of the audience as much as in the policies of the President and the government he represents.

President Obama speaks openly and for different groups in America, but he does not recognize the views of the groups that opposed him most vehemently during his presidency and the re-election campaign, political groups that would see government practically undone. President Obama retained his balanced view on the relationship between government and the individual in his inaugural address in 2013, but he also used the election year’s heated political discussions to frame a narrative in the speech on what it meant to be an American. His focus was particularly on the various government programs that had been severely criticized and had been accused of pacifying Americans. President Obama argued to the contrary, inspired by Kennedy’s use of antitheses: “They do not make us into a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great.” (Inaugural 2nd, 2013)

President Obama’s view of government cannot contain the group of Americans who view government as solely a problem in their lives. This challenges his ability to speak for the whole of the American people beyond an idealized inclusion of all groups in national unity. The question is, however, if any president can find room for all of the views represented by Congress and the even more diverse country this institution represents? President Obama’s regular standoffs with Congress during his first administration period, in particular on the Affordable Care Act⁸⁵, saw an increasingly hardened approach in the rhetoric of President Obama to the political negotiations with Congress, as exemplified in his State of the Union speech from 2014, where he spoke directly of executive action and the lack of progress on issues where Congress had more power than the President.

President Obama’s use of history has not seen him address the ‘permanent insurgency’ represented within the US government and described by Frank Rich in the 2013 article “The Furies Never End”, wherein Rich argues that the Tea Party within the Republican Party is not an isolated

⁸⁵ Which came to its latest climax with a government shutdown in October 2013.

phenomenon, but a recurring element of ‘anti-government’ sentiment working within government. (Rich, 2013) Yet how does one incorporate a view that is determined to delegitimize one’s own speaking position? The only way to incorporate this into a narrative of a people is to describe the narrative as one of a perpetual struggle with itself that will not be resolved. While President Obama does acknowledge the struggle, and his narrative of self contains a suggestion of a perpetual destabilization in the process of understanding one’s own identity, this ongoing need for change is meant to gradually strengthen one’s understanding of oneself, rather than weakening the identity by a tearing at both seams and heart. In political terms this would suggest that the American people’s debates on their government should have an aspect of evolution as its goal, rather than a stalemate of stark difference of opinions.

Conclusion

The moments with the greatest potential for defining a new way forward through the constitution of a narrative of the people often occur during times of crisis. These moments afford a better chance of changing people’s world perspective, due to the rupture in societal structures and challenges to governing values. Throughout the Economic crisis Americans were described by President Obama as “courageous”, “innovative”, and “responsible”. For President Obama the qualities of the individual American as characters had not changed during the crisis and Americans were just as able to perform their civic duty post-crisis, if they were only given the chance. President Obama attempted to seize the moment of the economic crisis, however, to present the American people with a narrative of the people that included a challenge to move the United States towards a clearer understanding of the diverse nature of their nation, as well as a more progressive future with responsibility for both the individual and for the government. In the 2012 State of the Union address, President Obama ended with a clear description of his political philosophy and what he wanted Americans to think of when they thought of the United States and its history: “No one built this country on their own. This nation is great because we built it together. This nation is great because we worked as a team.” (SOTU, 2012)

As we have discussed in this chapter, constitutive rhetoric is a way to identify people as part of a created collective identity. The narrative element in this process consists of linking historic events and contemporary issues to illustrate this identity more clearly for the audience. Presidents can establish these narratives of the people through the traditions of the presidential speech genres, by appealing to shared values, and/or by referencing particular aspects of the characterization of

U.S. identity. This has in the past led to exclusions of certain groups from the constitution of the “we” in the American People. With President Obama there was an increase in emphasis on the strength of diversity in the narrative of the people, and what role this diversity has played in the progressive project in the United States. President Obama emphasized an inclusion of different minority groups, be it of sexual orientation or race.

President Obama used the presidency rhetorically in alternative ways compared to his predecessors through his focus on the fight for civil rights as embraced by all minority groups of American society, and his willingness to bring the different groups into the larger narrative of the people in the United States. One reason for this can be found in the connection between his narrative of self⁸⁶, which resonated with so many voters in 2008, and that of the narrative of the people. Looking at his own life and his narrative of self, President Obama can be said to have the reasons and credence to believe in the narrative of people that he presents in his speeches. One could also adopt the view that President Obama’s increased outspokenness on immigration and gay rights issues from the first to the second inaugural is simply an attempt to connect with the values of the times through a sense of kairos in relation to the opinions of the American electorate.

Perhaps the answer can be found somewhere in the middle. In spite of what critics may say, President Obama has been keenly aware of his historic role as the first non-white president of the United States, and simply by being in the White House he has given voice and body to previously excluded groups in the United States. President Obama has followed some of the traditions of presidential rhetoric that Beasley speaks of, through the focus on an ideal vision of the United States and the unity that can be found in diversity. But President Obama also departs from these traditions in the same way as President Clinton did in his second inaugural. President Obama contributes to the changes in presidential rhetoric on the issue of the identity of the Americans by taking a more direct and detailed approach to the problems of diversity and suggests that the average American can help change this with personal action on the issues, instead of simply letting time take its course or wanting government institutions to handle the issue. While President Obama may not have referenced Martin Luther King’s sense of “the fierce urgency of now”, since the 2008 election, he still speaks of the present as a time to act and to reevaluate the morals of the United States on the issues of diversity and minority rights. In this sense, President Obama brings traditional values of Americans into a more postmodern reality where values are forever shifting.

⁸⁶ With parents in a racially mixed marriage, his two young daughters as evidence of his eye on gender equality, and his work as a community organizer when attempting to bring together different groups of people.

Hoerl's critique of the stifling approach that the media had to racial issues during Barack Obama's first inaugural also contains solutions to the silence on the subject of diversity and problematic sides of racial history in the United States that Barack Obama himself has presented in later statements: "Richer depictions of dissent [that] may also offer resources of counter-memory which point to continuities between historic and contemporary race relations." (Hoerl, 2012, p. 196) Particularly the notion of counter memory via rhetoric is something Barack Obama engaged with quite often in his memoir and his presidential campaign, but also in his presidency, by incorporating different people into the narrative of the United States in different ways. President Obama's narrative sparks during these ceremonial speeches present what one could call mild resistance rhetoric to history, where he either included previously unheard-of events or realigned well-known ones to incorporate minorities more clearly. He was able to do this from the Bully Pulpit because of his multivalent approach to narrative rhetoric, where the role of slave for instance does not hinder a descendant to feel as part of the waves of immigration to the United States. It then becomes the American people's ability to change and adapt to the moment that is their constant in the ever-shifting sea of progress. This ability is also what allows them to accept President Obama's reconstitution of the narrative of the people in the second inaugural in particular.

President Obama has not in the short run been able to change the politics of Washington, but in his openness towards diversity, in its challenges and benefits, he succeeds in establishing a constitutive rhetoric, which is reminiscent of the alternative Vanessa Beasley is arguing for, as she criticized previous presidents' approaches to the diversity of the American people. In the long run this approach to diversity will perhaps bring the changes to how Americans view themselves as a people, which was promised by Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential campaign.

Chapter 6. Innocents Abroad: Barack Obama's Narrative of the Nation

Introduction

In the previous case-based chapters, we have discussed how Barack Obama established himself as both protagonist and narrator in his narrative of self through his memoir and his early speeches up until his first Inaugural address. We then moved on to analyze how Barack Obama, through traditional presidential speeches such as the inaugural address and state of the union, presented the American people with new ways to view themselves and their shared identity through a narrative of people. What remains to be considered at the level of major presidential narrative themes is how the nation itself, the United States as such, has been described by President Obama in narrative terms. In order to do this, and to continue the emphasis on the president as a narrator-in-chief for the nation, the focus in this chapter will be on President Obama's description of the United States' historic ties to different regions of the world in a number of his foreign addresses. While Presidents also reference the narrative theme of the nation in domestic speeches, the foreign address as a rhetorical situation opens up for a more clear description of the nation as a whole in relation to foreign powers. These narratives of national relations for President Obama should be seen in the context of the international crises that have defined the United States and much of the rest of the world in the first decade of the 21st century: The War on Terror and the Economic crisis. In this way the foreign address can also be seen as an expression of two of the central political functions of the presidency: as commander-in-chief and as first diplomat for the nation.

The objective of this chapter is to show how Barack Obama as candidate and president uses settings, events, and characters to establish narrative links between nations in a similar way as he established the content of his narrative of self and narrative of people. The emphasis on tying together different *nations* as essentially major characters on a global stage is what distinguishes the narrative of nation from the narrative of self and people. The narrative of self links the speaker to his/her audience, and the narrative of people links the domestic audience to the president through a shared identity for the people. The emphasis of the narrative of nation is instead on linking the nation, which the speaker represents, to other nations, through a shared understanding of history and narrating events of cooperation. The audience for these narratives is both the local audience, and the American people watching their president representing them abroad.

The President of the United States has achieved a global speaking position through events of the 20th century, where the president's speeches abroad are broadcasted locally as well as representing a reflection of American views on the local region. In this way the speaking role of the president becomes global as well as the characters, setting, and events of his narratives in the foreign address speech. Historic references as we saw in the previous chapter on the narrative of people can be used to describe a common identity for a people, yet when discussing the narrative of nation, history is perhaps an even more important source for the President to consider when constructing narratives. While there are certain given historical topoi that an American audience can agree upon, establishing a similar 'place of understanding' or "communal definition" with a foreign audience can often require an emphasis on a shared past as a means to shore up the credibility of the link between the nations in the present, as well as setting the frame for the message of the speech. An important ability of narratives to consider, then, with the narrative of nation is the ability to "collapse time" (Murphy, 2011, p. 393) between historic events. The concept borrowed from an article by John Murphy is here understood as the idea of bringing events in history together in a speech through an editing process, which resembles that of constructing a narrative. In this sense a president chooses consciously to begin his narration of the shared history between two nations at a specific time in history, with a historic event that fits his message. Through this narration of history he can establish new parallels through the emphasis on specific events in time⁸⁷.

In order to discuss this international impact on the use of characters, settings, events, and a plot in presidential rhetoric, the term *public memory* will be introduced here as an important element for presidents in their use of narrative rhetoric. The term connects to narrative rhetoric, in a similar fashion as constitutive rhetoric was shown to do in the previous chapter. As case material for the chapter, candidate and President Obama's major addresses in different foreign settings such as Oslo, Cairo, and Berlin will be used. The contextual themes of these speeches are relevant in the discussion of President Obama's narrativization of the United States as a nation in the light of recent crises and in relationship to both allies and opponents on the world stage.

⁸⁷ James Jasinski gives one example of this selective use of historic references for a presidential speaker through President Ronald Reagan's description of the Contras position in Nicaragua. Here the President chose to ignore earlier U.S. involvement in the conflict, and 'reset' history. (Jasinski, 2001, p. 358)

Public Memory in Relation to Other Memories

James Jasinski gives an overview in the *Sourcebook on Rhetoric* (2001) of the development of the term public memory. Jasinski positions the term in relation to other forms of memory such as cultural memory, which is seen as more confrontational and vernacular⁸⁸. This form of memory suggests the need to reinterpret the past through a social construction, and establish a public memory through cultural representations⁸⁹. Memory as a term can thus be seen as representing both a public view of an event, but also a cultural interpretation. In the distinction between the two terms of public memory and cultural memory, Jasinski initially suggests that public memory refers to a dominant narrative of an event, while cultural memory refers to a narrative of resistance to hegemonic pressures: “Cultural memory reflects the particularized worldview and ethos of the members of a *particular* culture, [whereas] public memory is perhaps best conceived as an amalgam of the current hegemonic bloc’s cultural memory and bits and pieces of cultural memory that members of other cultures are able to preserve and protect.”(Jasinski, 2001, p. 355) Public memory, then, is often seen as referring to hegemonic narratives of the past that have been accepted as a truthful account.

In the book *Mystic Chords of Memory* (1993), Professor of American cultural history Michael Kammen examines the relationship between the individual’s conception of identity and a larger American cultural identity. This relationship has, according to Kammen, been constructed through an active approach to the nation’s past: “...societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and that they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind – manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”(Kammen, 1993 p. 3) Kammen points out both the positive and negative aspects of this establishment of a shared national past – such as social cohesion for the former and hegemonic practices for the latter, as described by Jasinski as well.

Where Jasinski defines the opposition between public and cultural memory, Kammen describes a similar oppositional relationship between “... collective memory (usually a code phrase for what is remembered by the dominant civic culture) and popular memory (usually referring to

⁸⁸ One example of cultural memory in national terms could be Spain’s relationship with the Franco dictatorship and the Civil War in the 1930s. The shifting representations of this period in literature and film right up to the present can be seen as examples of how national historic crises create the need for narrative clarification through cultural representations, for the present population to understand the past.

⁸⁹ For President Obama this also became relevant in his memoir with the issue of race in America being questioned from a personal angle and a societal one by Obama as an author. It is important to consider his foreword, where he describes his shift from a theoretical approach to a narrative, using his own life and the life of others to underscore the points on the theme that he wants to get across.

ordinary folks)...” (Kammen, 1993, p. 10) With these relationships between different forms of memory both Kammen and Jasinski point out that all forms of memory are places of constant challenges and battles, which are never settled, leaving the past up for negotiation. These challenging narratives are often described as counter narratives – narratives that “break silences” or represent alternatives to hegemonic narratives. It may seem difficult to describe the rhetoric of a president as a counter narrative to public history, since the presidency is such a clear proponent of institutional government and the nation state. Yet there is still a possibility for a president to shed new light on historic issues and on people and events not included previously by presidents in their public addresses, as we saw it with President Obama’s narrative of the people in the previous chapter. What both terms, public and cultural memory, relate to, according to Jasinski, is the relationship between the individual’s use of memory and a more intersubjective and collective approach (Jasinski, 2001, p. 355). It is the resulting collective memory that is the emphasis of this chapter, as it is considered how a president through his speeches can address the public memory of specific events.

The Imagined Nation

Researcher John Bodnar understands public memory as “... a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past [and] present, and by implication, its future.” (Bodnar, 1992, p.15) The understanding of the past in this way sees the term as something that can be influenced by the establishment of a fixed framework of memory. This framework becomes more tangible for people if it contains “events and figures” as Kristen Hoerl described it in her article “Selective Amnesia and Racial Transcendence in News Coverage of President Obama's Inauguration.” (Hoerl, 2012, p. 180) Hoerl’s references resemble the elements of a narrative that have been considered in this dissertation.

Bodnar and others represent the shift from a “passive view of memory” as a retrieval process to “...a matter of construction rather than reproduction.” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 356) The description of memory construction as an active process allows for a connection with the concept of narrative, since the construction process of a shared memory of the past is often established through a narration of this past. The content of a constructed memory also resembles that of a narrative’s content, where persons and events are used as anchors to strengthen the recollection of the past. The objectives of sharing a memory are also similar to that of narrative rhetoric with an attempt to establish clarification, coherence and identification on an issue. A speech becomes a relevant form

for expressing memory if we consider Jasinski's view of the construction process of public memory as "expressive form", regarding the construction of memory as an act in front of an audience (p. 356). The memories in this way gain their strength through the performance of epideictic speeches. Reiterations of the memories over time, however, are also needed to keep them present and dominant in the audience's mind. Particular memories of a shared past for citizens in the United States help them maintain this past. The reason for the repetition of certain memories, then, is due to the constant struggle over the past between hegemonic memories and oppositional or vernacular memories, which leads to the need for a ritual that can sustain the past. "...scholars generally agree that public memory never is completely hegemonic. The texture of public memory frequently is marked by intense struggle over *how* and *what* to remember." (p. 357) Kammen also comments on the need for public re-iterations of even seemingly well-known events with the calls to "Remember!" events such as the attacks on the Alamo and Pearl Harbor: "How often have we been exhorted to recall some public catastrophe, often a humiliation, precisely because amnesia seemed ominous." (Kammen, 1993, p. 9)

The point to make here is, according to Jasinski, that public memory is a source of power (p. 357). "In short, Public memory contributes substantially to the constitution of collective identity. What it means to be an American is determined, in part, by what we remember (and what we are encouraged to remember) about our past." (p. 358) This description of a national identity by Jasinski relates to the term constitutive rhetoric, which was discussed in connection with the Narrative of the People. Another scholar writing on this issue is Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (2006 ed.), where he describes how narrative is part of imagining the common identity for a nation, as Stephanie Hammer also pointed out in her article on Barack Obama's use of narratives during his 2008 campaign: "Benedict Anderson's account delivered the memorable reply that nations should be understood as imagined communities since the fundamental requirement to make a nation in the modern era is a narrative that tells the members of a community too large to truly know one another to 'imagine' themselves as a nation." (Hammer, 2010 p. 269) The challenge for the presidential speaker is to make the implausible concept of a nation of millions sharing specific values and ideas plausible on a daily basis.

Public Memory and Political Rhetoric

At a conference on Memory studies⁹⁰ in September 2013, Professor of Rhetoric Kendall Phillips, who specializes in public memory from a rhetorical perspective, spoke on the subject of connecting rhetoric with public memory. The conference theme was “Memory on Trial”. Based on this theme, it was argued by Phillips that the description of important events in the past has become a challenged concept, because of the subjectivity of memory, as we also saw Jasinski, Kammen, and other scholars argue. Even events of national historic attention can be interpreted through the present in ways that question the objective quality of the presentation. In particular the Bush administration’s handling of the 9/11 terrorist attack and the subsequent military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have raised questions in both the fields of storytelling politics and in memory studies on how far the political use of an event such as 9/11 can go without crossing a border for ethical behavior.

Phillips described memory as “the presence of things absent” (Phillips, 2013), meaning that we conjure up an image to understand that which is no longer with us or “remembering something that is not here with us in the present.” (Phillips, 2013) Memories are important to public memories, yet there is a fundamental vulnerability of memory of what can be remembered and what can be forgotten. Phillips used the term “The emporium of absence” to describe how memory can be used to fill this void. There is then both a need and an anxiety concerning the past, which a public speaker such as a president can alleviate by ‘stocking up’ the emporium for his audience. The value and need to constitute a public makes the understanding of the past of this public an important definition to influence through public memory. In this way, memory can be seen as both political and rhetorical.

Yet Phillips also described the perception of memory as an *art* that accepts the subjectivity of the process. Remembering, in this view, becomes an imaginary process, and in this way relates to the creative process of constructing a narrative, as we saw with Jasinski’s discussion of memory. The ‘poetics of memory’ as described by Phillips should be seen as a way to engage the experience of others. Poets, sculptures, filmmakers create speculation about the past, yet their projects are not just another view of the past, but also an example of how speculative the process itself is. In a similar fashion it could be suggested that a president’s words are a way to interpret the past⁹¹.

⁹⁰ “Ørecomm festival 2013”

⁹¹ President Obama’s contribution to this is a protagonist and a narrator that more readily questions the very foundations upon which the narrative is based, and the process of using the past in the present.

Another scholar dealing with the challenges of public memory is Hoerl, whose article on Barack Obama we discussed in the previous chapter. Hoerl promotes a view of public memory that should include forgetting as a term: “As a corollary to the concept public memory, selective amnesia refers to the rhetorical processes by which public discourse routinely omits events that defy seamless narratives of national progress and unity.” (Hoerl, 2012, p. 180) This not only describes Hoerl’s view of the problematic aspects of understanding history too narrowly, it also points to the challenges of narrative rhetoric. Similar to Phillips’ description of the challenges for memory studies, Hoerl suggests that “...sites of memory also comprise sites of struggle and contestation about contemporary politics and national identity... Such selective practices of memory construction have implications for political hegemony.” (p. 180) With the terminology Hoerl is using, she comes close to the ideas of Foucault, since she is focused on the unsaid, and the power structures that are established through the hegemony of a few. Her argument that memory is a battleground for political meaning, implies that remembering the past is important for policy issues, and that epideictic speech is valuable to consider in this aspect.

Presidential Rituals of Memory

A relevant text to consider is Bradford Vivian’s essay “A Timeless Now” in the book *Framing Public Memory*. Vivian’s focus is on memory and repetition, as Kendall Phillips writes in the introduction to the book: “The repetition of memories is not suggestive of their stability.” (Phillips, p. 8) This is important when considering the ritualistic repetition of certain events in public memory by presidents in their speeches. As we have seen from the above discussions, memory is often related to a practice of repetition with an emphasis on hegemonic strategies of more static views of the past compared to contested views. The speech ritual then becomes important in sustaining institutionalized memories, yet these rituals, as we saw with President Obama and his speeches on the narrative of the people, can also afford opportunities to present new approaches to the collective past, which other political speakers are more challenged to promote than the president is at a national level. During his period in office, the U.S. president presides over an ‘American Memory’, and the importance of the narrative of nation is in establishing this memory.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell have also dealt with this aspect of presidential rhetoric in their genre approach. They describe an element of timelessness in presidential speeches that needs to be recognized by the president in office. This element enables

the president to become part of a larger presidential tradition and step out of the actual moment he is giving the speech in (Jamieson & Campbell, 2008, pp. 46-49). He is able to do this, because of the speaker traditions that are part of the presidency. While this is an important part of presidential speeches, particularly in speeches with epideictic elements in them, such as the Inaugural Address, there is also a more direct use of the past for presidents in the speeches, which go beyond the epideictic traditions. This concerns the values of the nation and functions to establish a national ethos (p. 140). In the following, we will consider the content of these past references to the nation with an emphasis on particular examples, and their meaning for the term of American exceptionalism.

The Idea of a Nation

"Some people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American. America is the only idealistic nation in the world." Woodrow Wilson (president 1913-1921)

"There is nothing wrong in America that can't be fixed with what is right in America." Bill Clinton (president 1993-2001)

"That's the true genius of America: that America can change. Our union can be perfected. What we've already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow." Barack Obama (president 2009-)

Examples of rhetoric that praise the United States and its American citizens are not hard to come by in U.S. presidential speeches. As new and fresh as Barack Obama's emphasis on unity, hope, and change might have seemed in the 2008 presidential campaign, it was not something that previous modern presidents had neglected in their rhetorical descriptions of the United States. President Lyndon B. Johnson, for instance, in his 1965 inaugural address, described the United States in the following way: "It is the uncrossed desert and the unclimbed ridge. It is the star that is not reached and the harvest that's sleeping in the unplowed ground." (Johnson, 1965) The United States is the unfinished country, constantly in motion towards something better than its present incarnation. For the United States, this has often led to a discussion of the term 'American exceptionalism'. It is a term that similar to public memory should be understood subjectively rather than as objective truth.

Several scholars have written on President Obama's approach to American exceptionalism, including David Zarefsky and Jason Edwards in *The Rhetoric of Heroic*

Expectations (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014). Both Edwards and Zarefsky see President Obama as moving away from at least President George Bush's version of American exceptionalism. Where Zarefsky, however, sees the possibility for something entirely new in Barack Obama's approach to the description of the United States abroad, Edwards sees President Obama returning to a tradition. This tradition consists of speaking about American ideals as something to live up to rather than something that is a given.

Zarefsky describes the term American exceptionalism in the following way: "...often understood as signifying that the United States is qualitatively different from, and superior to, any other nation on Earth, and hence that it is entitled to behave as it wishes." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p.109) Zarefsky argues that President Obama in contrast to this has seen the United States' exceptionalism as a responsibility for the nation "... to help in creating partnerships on an equal basis with other nations sharing similar values." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p.109) President Obama offers an alternative through three distinct approaches to the rhetoric in his foreign policy: "...Obama constructed an alternative to the traditional rhetoric of American exceptionalism. [1] He rejected the unilateralist emphasis by stressing the interdependence of nations and the need for joint action. [2] He acknowledged American mistakes. And [3] he rejected the focus on American uniqueness by articulating connections between the United States and other nations, sometimes using his own biography to make his point." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p.117) This description of Barack Obama's approach to foreign policy also relates to what Condit described as "communal definition", yet here it is played out on a global scale. In the words of Zarefsky: "Obama acknowledged that American perceptions and actions must change, even as he called for change from others. He emphasized the need for multilateral actions and he stressed the need to surmount differences with recognition of common goals and values and the need for coordinated action in an interdependent world... Although there will be differences of interest and occasional justifications for war, they would be less likely if nations and people recognized how much they held in common." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, pp. 120-122) In this view of shared values across international communities, narratives that describe a shared view of the world also becomes important for the possibility of identification between President Obama and his foreign audience. Zarefsky remarks that President Obama could return to the version of American exceptionalism that focuses more on an internal expectation, rather than an external one. It is the United States who has to challenge itself to live up to its ideals, rather than

purporting to be the beacon of these ideals to the rest of the world. This strategy fits well with Obama's self-reflective style of presidential rhetoric compared to some of his challengers and his predecessors.

In similar fashion Jason Edwards argues that President Obama's foreign policy is about inclusion. Edwards agrees with Zarefsky on the point of President Obama's attempt to reset the foreign policy message of the United States. Dedicated to diplomacy and cooperation – the difference is in *how* US leadership is enacted (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 131). Edwards presents different strategies President Obama used to achieve this change. One is through acts of contrition⁹², where he acknowledges mistakes and even sins in the history of foreign policy of the United States. Instead of dictating, the United States needs to listen to its partners.

A second strategy is that of establishing more equal partnerships: Raising the partners' level to the same as the United States, rather than keeping it as a junior-senior relationship. The sharing of both investments and burdens would bring the partnerships closer together. The change would also indicate an “ ”engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values.” ” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 131) The change here is also in President Obama's role as speaker, which is a very important issue to draw from the review of his speeches as well as his emphasis on historic and personal narratives: “...Obama's discourse was different because he took on the role of teacher rather than dictatorial father.” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 141) This again refers to the initial conception of the president's role today by the former presidential speechwriter Jeff Shesol, where the president can use his unique speaking position to act as teacher for the nation.

Foreign Addresses by the 'Early Obama'

While we have spoken on the ceremonial aspect of the presidency earlier, the executive is also invested with very clear political tasks in the international relations between the United States and foreign nations. Influenced by the vulnerable situation for the United States following the nation's Revolutionary War (1776-1783), the founders of the United States saw the need for a branch of the newly formed federal government that could act more swiftly than Congress if the nation was cast into war once more (Jones, 2009). The role of Commander of the Armed Forces fell to the president under the title of Commander-in-Chief. The president's role as

⁹² The acknowledgement of wrongdoing is the first step of contrition according to Edwards. This is a recent development, where President Clinton “was the first president to confess the transgressions of America's foreign policy past.” (Vaughn, 2014 p. 134)

head of the U.S. military has only become more solidified over time, even when the president has had no formal military training. Congress from the beginning has had a check on the use of the Armed Forces through the power of the purse, its budgetary control, and later through the War Powers Resolution from 1973⁹³. Yet the president has found ways to initiate military action without the official approval of Congress. Even large scale conflicts such as the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1956-1975) were initiated without official approval by Congress. This military power of the presidency is also often part of the scholarly debate on presidential power. The role as commander-in-chief in itself is also discussed openly by President Barack Obama, which is reminiscent of his more open approach to his role as narrator. The commander-in-chief role is particularly considered when he discusses the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the use of drones in attacks on presumed terrorists.

The second role of the president abroad that is relevant to mention is that of “first diplomat” (Jones, 2009, p. 21). In this role, the president maintains international relations and recognizes new nations and foreign governments, as well as approves negotiations over treaties with other nations⁹⁴. Based on these presidential roles, and the emphasis on relations between nations in the narrative of nation, the speeches presented here are focused on foreign relations for candidate and President Barack Obama. The first speech was given before Barack Obama became president and in the setting of a strong ally for the United States; the second speech was given after President Obama had been sworn into office and it took place in the setting of a less stable partner to the United States; the third speech was given at a ceremonial event, which allowed President Obama to focus on broader global relations rather than the relationship between the host nation and the United States. All three speeches are epideictic in their function and in this way can be seen as opportunities for Barack Obama to formulate world views and values within which to present policies, rather than focusing on the actual policies themselves.

What is relevant to look at in connection with the narrative of the nation is both how President Obama establishes himself as a narrator of history for a foreign audience, how he references the setting of the speech, describes past events through narratives, and how these impact on the relationship between the nations, as well as how President Obama characterizes the United

⁹³ The War Powers Resolution stipulates that the president has to seek approval for the use of military force from Congress, if a military engagement lasts more than 60 days.

⁹⁴ Although treaties must still be approved by the Senate before they become binding. A well-known example of where this went wrong was with President Woodrow Wilson’s establishment of the League of Nations following World War I and the subsequent rejection of this league by the United States Congress.

States as a nation in the post 9/11 world, and through the use of narratives links the United States with the nation he is speaking in front of.

Berlin 2008: Barack Obama as a Citizen of the World

Barack Obama's first major foreign address was not given as president, but as a candidate for the U.S. presidency in the summer of 2008. Barack Obama gave the speech on July 24th at the Victory Column in Berlin. His solution to the constraint of giving a foreign address as a political candidate, rather than head of state, was to emphasize his role as citizen rather than as politician. Yet the strategy of an American politician to position himself as a citizen is also a strategy that U.S. presidents have used when speaking in Berlin. In this way, Barack Obama could still speak as a president without claiming to be one.

In the speech, Barack Obama described the ideal of being a citizen as something universal, and shared among people across the world. Barack Obama combined this with the stump speech version of his narrative of self, which we have examined in both his memoir and his domestic campaign speeches: "I know that I don't look like the Americans who've previously spoken in this great city. The journey that has led me here is improbable." (Berlin, 2008) In the speech, Barack Obama referenced both his connection to his American Grandparents' background in the U.S. heartland of Kansas and the goat herding of his African Grandfather and father in Kenya. These were two diverse backgrounds, which he was able to find a balance between through the openness of American society. This international aspect of his background situated his story in a global setting and thereby his role as narrator on an international stage. It allowed Barack Obama to discuss the public memory of a shared past between his present audience of Berliners and the nation of the United States, which he represented as a citizen. After having established his role as a narrator at an international level, Barack Obama used the setting of Berlin as a vantage point for world history. He selected events that represented links between the United States and Germany, focusing particularly on the anniversary of the Berlin Airlift (1948-49), where the nations worked together to great effect.

Barack Obama's Narration of the Berlin Airlift

In the 2008 Berlin Speech, Barack Obama focuses a great deal on the specific historic narrative of the Berlin airlift. He does so both through narrative anecdotes from the event, narrative sparks of moments connected to the airlift, as well as by entering the event into the larger narrative

arc of the Cold War. Barack Obama establishes the setting of the event by describing the rubble still present in the city in 1948 and connects this material description with the construction of the Berlin Wall, in spite of the fact that the structure was only raised in 1961, thirteen years after the airlift. The opening of this speech can therefore be seen as an example of the use of “collapsed time”, where events in history are brought together to enhance their meaning for the audience in the present. Barack Obama sets the scene further by describing the two sides of the Cold War conflict as characters with the “Soviet Shadow” on one side and the remaining countries of the allied forces on the other. Later Barack Obama also emphasizes the size difference between the forces, pointing out the greater strength of the Soviets in military numbers, elevating the challenge through the strength of the antagonist in the narrative. The setting of Berlin is also used to exemplify the larger historical conflict. “... all that stood in the way was Berlin. And that’s when the airlift began, when the largest and most unlikely rescue in the history brought food and hope to the people of this city.” (Berlin, 2008) Barack Obama in this way bases his broader historic arc of the Cold War on Berlin, the setting of his speech. By making the setting of Berlin a synecdoche for the Cold War, he heightens the importance of the Airlift event as well. The event is made even more daunting by the weather: “In the winter, a heavy fog filled the sky above, and many planes were forced to turn back without dropping off the needed supplies.” (Berlin, 2008) Barack Obama uses all these obstacles to enhance the challenges facing the characters of his narrative, the pilots in the sky and the Berliners on the ground, and the bond that was forged between them, precisely because of the daunting challenge: “Sixty years ago, the planes that flew over Berlin did not drop bombs; instead they delivered food, and coal and candy to grateful children. And in that show of solidarity, those pilots won more than a military victory. They won hearts and minds; love and loyalty and trust – not just from the people in this city, but from all those who heard the story of what they did here.” (Berlin, 2008) The Berlin Airlift, Barack Obama reminds his audience, occurred during a conflict where the “hearts and minds” of the local population were not turned against the Americans for their military actions. The U.S. military was welcomed by the ‘occupied’ people of Berlin following this event in contrast to the military development in Iraq during the U.S. presidential election of 2008.

Barack Obama continues to return to the narrative of the airlift throughout the speech. He thereby gives the event importance and historic value by reiterating it within the individual speech through different narrative structures. The value of the moment is both argued by emphasizing the 60th anniversary of the event, but also by Barack Obama’s linking structure from the past to the present, and his suggested parallel: “Now the world will watch and remember what we do here with

this moment.” (Berlin, 2008) Berlin as a setting for world events has again become a symbol for cooperation.

In the speech Barack Obama uses the words of then Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter during the Airlift: “Look at Berlin”⁹⁵. By pulling the Mayor’s words from history, Barack Obama strengthens his own words. Barack Obama uses this to move into a number of narrative sparks that are meant as examples of how Berlin can be seen as a role model for the world to follow. The city is given a temporary lease on top of the shining hill, which the United States usually occupies in the narrative of the nation: “People of the world – look at Berlin, where a wall came down, a continent came together, and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one.” (Berlin, 2008)

Barack Obama’s reason for using the public memory of a past success such as the Berlin Airlift is to give clarity to complicated issues of the present. Barack Obama connects the public memory of the airlift with the present through the ‘spirit’ of the event: “It was this spirit that lead airlift planes to appear in the sky above our heads, and people to assemble where we stand today. And this is the moment when our nations – and all nations – must summon that spirit anew.” (Berlin, 2008)

The United States as a Nation Linked to Germany

The relationship between the US, Germany, and the World is a theme of the speech and described through the narrative of the nation. President Obama presents a consideration on which alliances to form in contrasts to the admonition of President Washington and other presidents not to become entangled in alliances across the ocean. This standing alone for the United States is no longer a possibility or a priority according to Barack Obama. Yet he also describes the “differences between America and Europe” in the speech. Initially he recognizes the mistrust between the nations, but also the responsibility, and the need for partnership: “But the burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together.... In this new century, Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more... Partnership and cooperation among nations is not a choice; it is the only way, the one way, to protect our common security and advance our common humanity.” (Berlin, 2008) In this view of the relationship across the Atlantic, Barack Obama transfers his personal narrative theme of community inclusion to the global stage of relationships between nations, and he

⁹⁵ Barack Obama’s reference is translated from Ernst Reuter’s sentence in German: “Schaut auf Berlin.”

suggests the changes in U.S. Foreign relations that both Edwards and Zarefsky spoke of when describing Barack Obama's approach to American exceptionalism.

Yet in this relationship, Barack Obama also speaks openly of problems with the United States: "I know my country has not perfected itself. At times, we've struggled to keep the promise of liberty and equality for all of our people. We've made our share of mistakes, and there are times when our actions around the world have not lived up to our best intentions. But I also know how much I love America. I know that for more than two centuries, we have strived – at great cost and great sacrifice – to form a more perfect union; to seek, with other nations, a more hopeful world." (Berlin, 2008) Barack Obama here uses the personal narrative theme of the perfecting project of the Union, which was present throughout his 2008 campaign, but he also attaches the theme to the cooperation needed with other nations in this speech.

The Berlin speech uses an event which both Americans and the local population have a relationship to in public memory. By drawing on this event extensively and establishing different narrative structures around it throughout the speech, Barack Obama is able to achieve a sense of identification with his foreign audience. In this recognition of the local history of the setting he speaks in, he establishes room for the suggested changes to U.S. policy also presented in the speech.

Speech in Cairo 2009

Barack Obama's first major foreign address as president was of political importance, since it dealt with a potential shift in policy towards a region that had experienced an increasingly strained relationship with the United States due to the Iraq war. The speech was given at Cairo University on June 4, 2009. What we will look at here is how President Obama addresses the relationship between the United States and the Middle East. Is there a difference in the description of Germany (Berlin) and Egypt (Cairo)? Is there a certain historic event in the speech used similarly to the Berlin airlift? What is President Obama's description of the people of Cairo compared to the people of Berlin? How does President Obama describe the relationship between the Middle East and the United States?

President Obama initially acknowledges the situation and questionable value of giving a speech as president: "... no single speech can eradicate years of mistrust, nor can I answer in the time that I have this afternoon all the complex questions that brought us to this point." (Cairo, 2009) President Obama asks the audience to tone down their expectations with this acknowledgement of the limits for himself as speaker and for the needed solution to a complicated past relationship

between the United States and the region. This is one example of how Barack Obama transfers his openness of narration to the presidential speaker role. President Obama also speaks openly about the faults of the United States during the Cold War, where “Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations.” (Cairo, 2009) President Obama in this sense recognizes the problems created by both nations, not only the host nation. President Obama’s goal is to move away from the extreme views on both sides concerning the other nation and instead find the middle ground between the nations: “... America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles...” (Cairo, 2009) President Obama follows up this argument by using his own experiences with the Muslim faith in a narrative that aims to establish an accepted position as narrator for him on the issue of US-Muslim relations: “Now part of this conviction is rooted in my own experience. I’m a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims. As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and at the fall of dusk. As a young man, I worked in Chicago communities where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith.” (Cairo, 2009) President Obama uses these narrative sparks from his past to both emphasize his personal experience with Islam, and that the Muslim faith has a place in U.S. society that is not often recognized at the public level the presidency, which Barack Obama is able to speak from⁹⁶.

History of Islam Rather than of Cairo or Egypt

Where President Obama focused on Berlin in the first speech, he uses the history of Islam as the ‘setting’ of his narrative in this speech instead. One reason for this broader emphasis could be that the speech at Cairo University was not only intended for an Egyptian audience, but for the whole Middle Eastern region. President Obama narrates the history of the religion through three narratives tied to the local setting of the speech: First he uses a paragraph to describe the history of the local setting of where he is speaking. President Obama describes different inventions and teachings in the Islamic world. In this way he presents the broad positive contributions of Islam to the world. Second, the local setting and its history is placed in relation to the United States: “I also know that Islam has always been a part of America’s story... The first nation to recognize my

⁹⁶ What is interesting to point out here is that President Obama emphasizes his experiences with Islam, which he spoke of in his memoir, but did not draw upon in his many campaign speeches. He saves this part of his narrative of self for an audience who shares this past with him.

country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second president, John Adams, wrote, “The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility of Muslims.” And since our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States.” (Cairo, 2009) Here President Obama uses both lesser known historic events and presidential quotes that have not been used often in presidential rhetoric, to show his administration’s changed understanding and attention to the public memory of the relationship between the United States and the region. This leads to the third narrative related to the local audience, where President Obama describes Muslims’ place within American society: “They have fought in our wars; they have served in our government; they have stood for civil rights; they have started businesses.... They’ve won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building, and lit the Olympic Torch. And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Qur’an that one of our Founding Fathers – Thomas Jefferson – kept in his personal library.” (Cairo, 2009) Here President Obama has the same inclusive goal in sight as we discussed in the chapter on the narrative of the people, where he incorporated previously ‘unmentioned’ groups in his rhetoric as president and thereby introduced them into U.S. public memory as well. Without naming their names directly, Fazlur Khan (the architect behind the “tallest building”) and Muhammad Ali (the boxer who “lit the Olympic Torch” in 1996 in Atlanta, Georgia) are put forth as narrative sparks of Muslim excellence, and history is collapsed between the reference to the presidential character of President Jefferson and a present day Muslim member of the U.S. Congress.

With these three narratives shaped to the local setting, President Obama seeks to affect the public memory on relations between Islam and the United States by first recognizing Islam’s own historic qualities; the connection with the United States throughout history; and finally Islam as a positive presence within the United States. To this he adds the connection he has experienced with Islam within his own past and narrative of self: “Now much has been made of the fact that an African American with the name Barack Hussein Obama could be elected President. But my personal story is not so unique.” President Obama describes the dreamlike quality of his rise as being held by all immigrants to the United States: “and that includes nearly 7 million American Muslims in our country today...” (Cairo, 2009) President Obama addresses the presence of Muslims in America much more clearly, than he did with Germans or Europeans living in the United States in his 2008 Berlin speech. The history of European immigration to the United States is a well-known one for both the local and American audiences, and did not need to be iterated in

the Berlin speech in the same manner as Muslim immigration needs to be established as part of the public memory of both the local and the American audience to the speech in Cairo.

President Obama concludes on the linkage between Islam and the United States in this way: “So let there be no doubt – let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America.” (Cairo, 2009) The point of making this historic recognition, of the links between the two nations in narrative themes that move from individual efforts to a narrative of shared cultural achievements, is to allow President Obama to ask for the same detailed and renewed understanding of U.S. history by the local audience: “America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire.” (Cairo, 2009) He goes on to describe the founding of the U.S. – in both rebellion towards an empire and the ideals of the founding – and the price paid for these ideals. With this use of narrative arcs of nations spanning the centuries of history, President Obama is expanding on his belief that the concept of establishing a common understanding between two people, or two communities, through narration can be applied to nations as well, where the presentation of the nation’s past can reveal the commonality needed to work together in the present.

Linking Nations: A History of Tensions

After the initial description of the historic relationship between the United States and Islam, President Obama moves on to the moral responsibility of the whole world, and the connectedness between nations. He focuses on the problems between the nations through “tensions” that need to be confronted. The narrative being told with this section of the Cairo speech is then one of conflict rather than collaboration as described by the Berlin speech’s emphasis on the event of the Berlin Airlift. The tensions in the Cairo speech include violent extremism in the shape of terrorism, where President Obama describes the war in Afghanistan as caused by the 9/11 event and the terrorists as instigators of the conflict. “These are not opinions to be debated; these are facts to be dealt with.” (Cairo, 2009) President Obama begins history at a specific point in time here with the terrorist attack as the starting point, rather than the complicated backstory on the terrorists’ motivations for the attack, for instance. The description of Al Qaeda is placed in a similar clear opposition to Islam: “... they have killed Muslims. Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations, and with Islam. The Qur’an teaches that whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind. And the Holy Qur’an also says, whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind.” (Cairo, 2009) Yet even in the case of the reaction to 9/11 President Obama also mentions faults on the side of the United States in the reaction to the terrorist attack. E.g., the Iraq

war is described as a lesson learned for the United States: “Nine-eleven was an enormous trauma to our country. The fear and anger that it provoked was understandable, but in some cases it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals. We are taking concrete actions to change course.” (Cairo, 2009)

A second tension mentioned is the relationship between Israel and Muslim countries. The memory of the holocaust is brought forth, and again President Obama underscores that he is speaking factually: “Denying that fact is baseless; it is ignorant; and it is hateful.” (Cairo, 2009) But President Obama also recognizes the situation of the Palestinians: “For more than 60 years they’ve endured the pain of dislocation... So let there be no doubt: The situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable.” (Cairo, 2009) President Obama argues for the ‘two state solution’ through the narrative of nation, here shaped as a lesson to foreign nations on how to solve national problems of their own.

President Obama uses U.S. history as an example for the Palestinians to follow, and learn from: “Palestinians must abandon violence. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and it does not succeed. For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights. It was a peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America’s founding.” (Cairo, 2009) Here we see an example of an edited version of history and public memory with President Obama’s approach to the history of U.S. slavery and the founding of the United States. The violence of both the War of Independence and the Civil War is not included by President Obama as a necessary part in the change of the United States as a nation and its view on slavery. Both wars played a significant part in establishing the United States as a nation, and the latter in achieving more equal rights for African Americans in the United States. President Obama instead jumps forward to the Civil Rights Movement, and fixes his narrative on the non-violent side of the movement with an emphasis on Martin Luther King’s initial vision of the Civil Rights Movement. That this eventually helped the cause take a leap forward in the 1960s, cannot remove the fact that violent reactions were needed to even create the possibility of a more peaceful approach to the cause of civil rights for African Americans. It has, for instance, also been suggested that President Lyndon Johnson’s Civil Rights Laws were made possible in part because of the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963.

To suggest that Palestinians take heed of America’s non-violent history of civil rights for African Americans, then, is somewhat of a stretch that President Obama makes in the speech

without recognizing the editorial agenda of this particular narrative, which he was better able to do in his memoir.

In this speech we see a shift for President Obama from citizen to presidential-teacher, where he, to gain ethos with his local audience, first sets up a shared sense of history by establishing a public memory of events and characters that tie the United States together with the region dominated by Islam. While President Obama also argues for a more equal relationship between the two actors in play in the national relationship, his emphasis is on cautionary tales rather than moments leading to eventual triumph, this combined with his clear editing of his narrative of peaceful struggle for civil rights and nationhood in the U.S. creates a problematic aspect of his use of narratives in the Cairo Speech compared to the Berlin Speech.

The 2009 Oslo Speech

The Nobel Peace Prize speech President Obama gave in Oslo on December 10th 2009 is the most overtly ceremonial of the three speeches considered in this chapter. While the speech was given under positive circumstances, it also presented President Obama with significant constraints as a speaker. President Obama had to address that the peace prize was given so early in his presidency, that the reason for the award was based on his words rather than his presidential deeds⁹⁷. At the same time he was receiving a peace prize while being the commander-in-chief of an army engaged in two wars across the globe, and he had just approved an increase in soldiers in one of these conflicts. But the 2009 Oslo speech also allowed President Obama the most freedom to choose which narratives to present of the speeches analyzed here. President Obama ended up giving a speech that dealt abstractly with the use of military force, rather than the actual crises of the wars still progressing or the relationship between the United States and the host nation. With the focus on terms such as ‘war’ and ‘peace’, rather than actual events, his focal point in the speech became the formulation of a balanced argument for his position on “just wars” via historic references throughout the speech to a large narrative arc through the history of man in relation to war.

The Nobel Peace Prize Award can be seen as the pinnacle of *Obamamania* (or the beginning decline of the same phenomenon). This emphasis on the attraction of his public character in the reasoning behind the prize, forces President Obama to discuss his role as president in the speech.

⁹⁷ In narrative terms one could describe it as the hero winning the kingdom for simply stating the intention of slaying the dragon.

But rather than only focus on his own role, President Obama turns the speech into a historic reflection on the problems he faces as president, and how to deal with them in the light of history. Instead of only speaking of peace President Obama speaks of the relationship between peace and war, two seeming opposites that he sought to find a bridge between, in similar fashion as to when he had sought to link diverse nations in the previous speeches, or diverse communities in his narrative of people, or diverse identities in his narrative of self. Here the linking narrative is between two abstract concepts that in their application have clear implications for real world politics.

Recognizing the Internal Inconsistency in his Role as Narrator-in-Chief

Although he was the President of the United States, and by some seen as the most powerful man in the world, Barack Obama addresses the prize given to him in the following way: “Compared to some of the giants of history who’ve received this prize – Schweitzer and King; Marshall and Mandela – my accomplishments are slight.” (Oslo, 2009) President Obama follows this up with an emphasis on “the unrecognized millions” (Oslo, 2009) who had done more than he had to deserve the prize. With this opening of the speech President Obama recognizes the constraint of the situation, and removes himself from the elevated position the prize supposedly bestows on him as speaker and as narrator on world relations, by referencing both historic figures and the peoples of the world working to promote peace.

But President Obama also quickly moves away from this opening by emphasizing the question of his role as a peace-prize-winning commander-in-chief: “... I am responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in a distant land. Some will kill; and some will be killed.” (Oslo, 2009) President Obama does not give a direct answer to this contradiction. Yet he uses it as the starting point for a discussion of the relationship between war and peace, both referencing Martin Luther King and Gandhi and their peaceful solutions: “I know there’s nothing weak – nothing passive – nothing naïve – in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.” (Oslo, 2009) Yet President Obama also underlines that historic conflicts such as WWII or Terrorist movements could not be stopped through non-violent methods alone, a contrast to his smoothing over of the violence in U.S. history and race relations in the Cairo speech. Instead President Obama, in the Oslo speech, uses his speaker position and the setup of his role as narrator to underscore the implicit contradiction in what he is about to speak about, and the linked relationship between war and peace, and how neither of the two concepts seemed to be able to exist without the other. In this way Barack Obama embraces the controversy of his speaker position in the same way as he had embraced

Reverend Wright. Rather than smoothing over the issue Barack Obama speaks out about the controversy and asks the audience to consider his narratives in the light of their inherent contradictions, rather than presenting a simple coherent message.

President Obama's History Lesson on the Concept of War

President Obama describes war as a concept keyed into the very nature of man – a way of determining progress or at least power relations through world history. “Now these questions are not new. War, in one form or another, appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease. War was the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences.” (Oslo, 2009) President Obama in this way connects war to basic human evolution, by going back to the first cave man to stand erect with weapon in hand, or perhaps even Adam's war with God. In this way President Obama states that war has always been with us, and he paints a narrative arc through history to include ‘war’ in public memory as a universally understood concept. Into this relationship between man and war, he introduces the “concept of just war”. (Oslo, 2009) This concept is understood as a war that is fought after attempts to achieve goals peacefully have been exhausted.

From this opening on the narrative of war as a concept inherent in man, President Obama traces the developing aspects of war in human society, building his case along the way: “Wars between armies gave way to wars between nations – total wars.” (Oslo, 2009) Part of this progression through the history of the evolution of war is the inclusion of civilian populations in the wars fought in Europe, for instance. Another development is towards wars that are internal conflicts rather than wars between nations. The rules set up by the international society are not always applicable or followed in these internal wars, which leads President Obama to the dilemma of the relationship between international institutions and the sovereign right of a national leader. Here President Obama is at his most vague in the speech, since he first points out the need of an international counsel to oversee conflict between peoples within and between nations, but he also argues that he has the right to act as he sees fit as a leader of a nation. This approach to the choice of using a nation's military should be seen in the context of a post-9/11 United States that has moved the issue of international intervention from a matter of U.S. political interests to a question of U.S. existence, as President George W. Bush's rhetoric and references to the frontier topoi in the aftermath of 9/11 led to for the foreign policy of the United States. While President Obama seeks a more nuanced view of the causes of war, he still retains the justification to make decisions on using

U.S. military force in the grey zones outside the resolutions of international institutions such as the United Nations.

The Narrative Arc of the United States' Military and Narrative Sparks of Individual Resilience

After establishing both the narrative arc of the historic evolution of war in relation to human civilization and arguing for his position as commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces, President Obama describes the role of the United States Army itself. He does so in a similar narrative arc focused on history, as he did with the concept of war. For President Obama the narrative arc covers six decades, in which the United States has fought wars to create peace. President Obama also emphasizes the role American soldiers have played in history to protect peaceful interests in places such as Germany, Korea, and the Balkans. The progression for the character of the U.S. military through the settings of war is towards a 'better world' through necessary confrontations. President Obama goes as far as stating that "America has never fought a war against a democracy." (Oslo, 2009) This is the kind of claim that may be correct, but contains some "forgetting" of historic events: for instance, the CIA's covert involvement in different conflicts around the world⁹⁸. Yet President Obama states that "I believe the United States of America must remain a standard bearer in the conduct of war. That is what makes us different from those we fight." (Oslo, 2009) In this way the president is still arguing for the rules of war. He does so through narrative rhetoric by using the settings of famous wars; the character of the U.S. military, its soldiers, and the United States; as well as presenting a plot with a progression influenced positively by the United States.

In parallel to the role of the United States' military in conflicts, President Obama uses narrative sparks of anonymous people as inspiration for a continued effort to support "just war", or at least resistance to oppression around the world: "Somewhere today, in the here and now, in the world as it is, a soldier sees he's outgunned, but stands firm to keep the peace. Somewhere today, in this world, a young protestor awaits the brutality of her government, but has the courage to march on. Somewhere today, a mother facing punishing poverty still takes the time to teach her child, scrapes together what few coins she has to send that child to school – because she believes that a cruel world still has a place for that child's dreams. Let us live by their example." (Oslo, 2009) These are narrative sparks of idealized moments of conflict, establishing a more global approach to

⁹⁸ Such as the Chilean Coup D'état in Chile in 1973, where the military junta was also recognized by the United States, following the actions against publicly elected Salvador Allende

the subject, than the narrative arc of the U.S. military is able to suggest in spite of the many wars the United States has participated in around the world. With these anonymous individuals, President Obama returns to the opening of his speech and his praise of the many anonymous people working for peace. This laboring for peace, with the narrative sparks of the individuals here at the end of the speech also includes standing up to oppression, even if this means conflict. War is tied to these individual examples of resistance, and both resistance *and* war are used to fight injustice in the path to peace according to President Obama.

The Nobel Peace Prize Speech is in many ways the most complex of the three speeches presented here. First and foremost because President Obama attempts to bridge a controversial subject rather than shy away from it. He uses an establishment of public memory once again to establish a frame through which to understand his message. Yet in this speech the arc is stretched nearly as far as it can go, from the dawn of man's fight with its own species to the streets of modern day conflicts and resistance. While President Obama once again at some points 'forgets' certain parts of U.S. history, the attempt to present an educational narrative on the role of war in a peace prize speech shows President Obama's willingness to challenge his audience rather than simply presenting an upbeat narrative of achieved successes.

Conclusion

This chapter placed an emphasis on viewing the narrative arcs, anecdotes, and sparks used by President Obama as a means to connect the United States as a nation with other nations and world issues through the aid of narrative rhetoric. This emphasis on connection between nations "...paralleled his stress on community domestically..." as pointed out by Jason Edwards when writing on the foreign policy in President Obama's rhetoric (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014 p. 261). The use of these narratives have allowed a discussion of President Obama's historical focus on a mending of international relationships, and his realignment of presidential and, thereby, U.S. authority on the global stage. This realignment has been focused on establishing the same kind of communal definition as in the case of the narrative of people in President Obama's domestic speeches. The 2008 Berlin speech showed candidate Obama's campaign emphasis on cooperation elevated to an international setting through the narration of the Berlin Airlift event as a specific event within the speech, as well as an acknowledgement from candidate Obama on current challenges between two allied nations. The 2009 Cairo speech showed a narrative from President Obama that sought to acknowledge the larger narrative arc of a region's history through a cultural

inclusion similar to his inclusion narratives of the people in his domestic speeches, and of the self in his memoir. President Obama emphasized faults on both sides of the national borders even more emphatically in the Cairo speech than in the Berlin speech, and sought to amend this through a historic incorporation of Islamic history and people into the national identity of the United States. In the 2009 Oslo speech, President Obama used history as a source for a detailed narrative arc on the concepts of war and peace in a post- 9/11 world as influenced by man's perpetual struggle with war. The 2009 Oslo speech is the speech, of the three discussed here, that draws most exhaustively on history to define its central argument, which focuses on the concept of 'just war'. Where the first two speeches are focused on a particular nation or a region and its relationship to the United States, the central relationship in the 2009 Oslo speech is somewhat more abstract. Rather than focusing on the relationship between two national or regional entities, it is the relationship between the two concepts of war and peace that is discussed. Yet this discussion of seemingly incompatible subjects also relates to President Obama's narrative theme of inclusion at an abstract level.

The three speech examples each represented different approaches to telling a narrative, where the Berlin speech focused on a specific historic event, the Cairo speech focused on a broader narrative arc shared by several nations, and the Oslo speech drew its narrative focus from a debate of how a particular concept, war, had been understood throughout history. Overall the speeches relate to the fact that President Obama was in the beginning of his own presidency, and that he in many ways was still aligning his own narrative of the United States as a nation in contrast to the narrative of nation presented by President George W. Bush. The main point to make with this is that President Obama, as he did with the narrative of the people, tried to present a 'reimagined' narrative in his speeches, an alternative approach to the description of the United States Post 9/11. President Barack Obama in these early and highly publicized speeches discussed the change he wished to make to the international identity of the United States and the international relations with the nation, which President George W. Bush had left to President Obama in the White House.

With a focus on establishing links between nations by refocusing the Public Memory of historic relations between nations and recognizing faults in the United States, President Obama initiated the process that a scholar such as Judith Butler sought after 9/11 (Butler, 2006), by presenting the United States as a more self-reflective and equal partner on the political world stage. Yet President Obama was heavily criticized for this approach to foreign policy by his political opponents. Perhaps more troubling than this oppositional political critique, however, were the actual political decisions and actions made on issues of national security by President Obama and

his administration following the speeches. These actions, such as the increased use of espionage against international allies and drones against presumed terrorists, have shown that the words of President Obama were not necessarily followed up by policy. This has also had an influence on Barack Obama's narrative rhetoric, as we shall consider in the perspectives section in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 7. “There you go again”: Developing Narrative Themes over Time

Sustaining a Narrative across Campaigns

The above quotation “There you go again” is a well-known comical jab by then Governor Ronald Reagan directed towards incumbent President Jimmy Carter at a presidential debate during the 1980 election. While comedic in tone the quotation also fits as a more serious introductory remark to this chapter that deals with how presidential candidates return to the presidential and personal narrative themes across election periods and while in office. This repetition of certain narrative themes leads to the question of whether a narrative can be said to have an expiration date?

Scholars writing on the presidential use of epideictic speech wherein narratives occur have pointed out the dilemmas involved in the temporal wear and tear of narratives that establish certain world views or a certain persona for the president. Events can often turn against the narration, or even the character, of the president, which has been built up through the use of narratives (Lewis, 1987; Murphy, 2003). This chapter seeks to answer the question of how such events that over time challenge the different presidential and personal narrative themes are met by President Obama in his narrative rhetoric. Speeches from Barack Obama’s two election campaigns in 2008 and 2012 will be compared to illustrate this process of developing the narrative themes of Barack Obama’s rhetoric.

The chapter will be an exploration of how the three presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation evolve together over time for a speaker, as the candidate needs changes from one election campaign to another. While the previous case-based chapters have introduced additional and relevant theory that includes narrative in their concepts this chapter focuses more on bringing the three presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation together and emphasize the context in which these themes are presented. In this way the chapter functions as a summary of the previous three case-based chapters’ exploration of the content of the presidential narrative themes, as well as the use of the themes by President Barack Obama.

To show why these different presidential narrative themes have had a place in the campaign rhetoric of Barack Obama, we initially deal with the history of election campaigns for U.S. presidents. Then we concentrate on the national party conventions, as an event during the campaign cycle, where the speech of a candidate is still at center stage for the message of the campaign. The constraints facing President Obama in the 2012 election compared to 2008 will also be dealt with,

emphasizing the challenge of maintaining both the presidential and personal narrative themes across the two elections and through the political events that have shaped President Obama's first administration period. Domestic issues such as the economic recession and the health care reform, as well as international issues such as the Arab Spring and the continuing War on Terror have had an influence on Barack Obama's policies as president. The choices he has made on these issues have also affected his ability to portray himself, the people, and the nation in narrative form⁹⁹.

Narrative Longevity

Whether or not a political narrative can be said to have an expiration date leads to the question of whether a candidate such as Barack Obama, who relied so clearly on his narrative of self in his first presidential campaign, would present his personal story differently in his second campaign? If we consider the writings of the scholars we have dealt with, Fisher considered the temporal issue of narratives' sustainability with his terms *narrative fidelity* and *probability*. The conditions of narrative probability, for instance, can be applied across speeches with a narrative that is returned to over time, since the main purpose of narrative probability, as a term, is to determine whether the internal logic in the narrative is maintained. This could be applied to not only one text, but across a series of texts, such as the speeches of a presidential candidate during his campaign. Yet McClure's term *narrative identification* should also be considered when addressing changes to a narrative over time. His argument was that the ability of the audience to identify with the narrative was what allowed changes to occur in the narrative, that could still seem feasible for the audience. In fictional content a person can change through character growth for instance. If this growth seems natural and makes sense within the world established, in relation to the motivations of the character and to the events the character is subjected to, then the audience will be able to maintain its identification with the character in spite of the changes. In similar fashion a politician can potentially change his views over time as long as these changes seem plausible to the audience in the context of the politician's personal character and the ongoing events. If we consider the idea of viewing presidential rhetoric as an ongoing conversation that can draw on smaller narrative structures such as Georgakopoulou's theory of *small stories* describes it, time can actually be helpful for the speaker to establish a further

⁹⁹ Some scholars even claim that the narrative portrayal of a candidate's campaign themes trumps the issues dealt with: "Looking at presidential politics as a contest of narratives has a tremendous explanatory power... For all the campaign talk about résumés and experience, issues and qualifications, it is the battle of stories, not the debate on issues that determines how Americans respond to a presidential contender." (Cornog, 2004 pp. 4-5)

understanding of specific references between the president and his audience with which he has the constructed conversation.

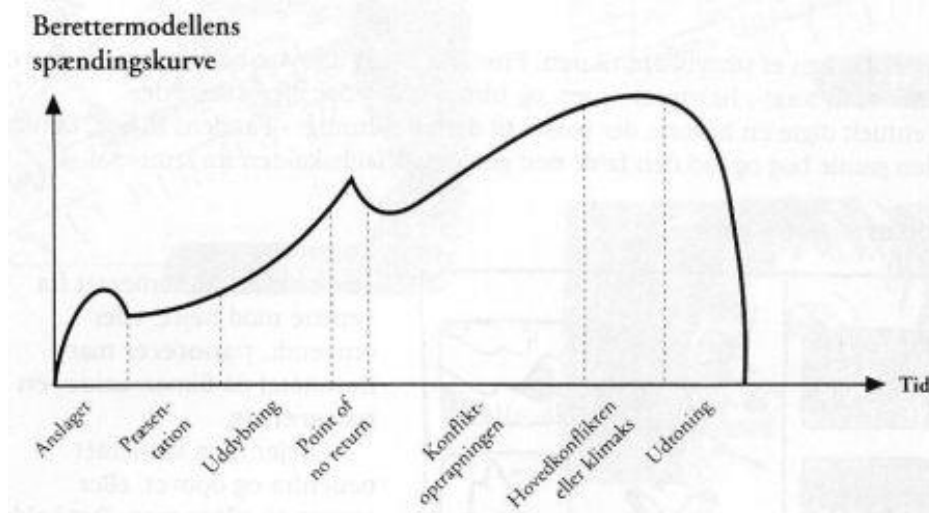
The changes made to a narrative theme are often due to changes in the context the in which the narrative is presented, such as the years Barack Obama had served as president between the two election periods. In addition, Barack Obama's use of the presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation during the 2008 election created high expectations for his presidency as pointed out by a number of scholars (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014). These high expectations have led to a general sense of disappointment in the media and public polls over lack of political results for President Obama that could match the rhetoric of the 2008 campaign. The media used this lack of 'fulfillment' following the climax of the 2008 election night speech for a traditional 'hero-to-villain-cycle'. The expectations for Barack Obama's abilities as president were built up before being torn down. This disappointment with his lack of political results was another issue that President Obama would have to address in his narratives in the 2012 campaign speeches.

Another important element to consider in the longevity of a narrative for President Obama is his "...characterization of the covenant as an unfinished practice." (Murphy, 2011, p. 397) This *lack* of closure is key to a political narrative, as we have discussed earlier, and it becomes even more so in a reelection cycle. The voter has to feel that there is still work to be done and/or believe that there is still a convincing "story of now" (Ganz, 2011) to participate in. When winning an election, a climax moment inevitably occurs on the election night of the campaign, which challenges the open-ended structure of politically motivated narratives. The goal after the climax then becomes for the speaker to create the next logical chapter in the narrative for the self, the people, and the nation. The narrative themes go on, and new goals have to be introduced to maintain a sense of progression, and momentum with the audience. A candidate for instance has a clear antagonist to play up against during an election period in the shape of a political opponent, the political establishment, or an overarching issue. The use of such an antagonist can be beneficial for the narrative of a campaign, much in the same way as a strong villain can be essential for a good story.

Yet once the election is over, the winner will have to work *with* the political establishment. With the U.S. political system of checks and balances, the president will often not have the majority in all chambers of Congress in spite of having won the election for the White House. This change from campaign rhetoric to presidential rhetoric also represented a challenge for Barack Obama as president, where the setbacks of political actions were more lasting than on the election trail, and

the outcomes of the political fights with Congress did not always signify as clear a victory as on election night.

The Narrative Arc of Campaigns: Narrative Progression within the Campaign Cycle



Model 1

(Translation of Danish terms in the model: X-axis: "Tid" = Time. Y-axis: Level of tension in the narrative. Points along the line of progression of the narrative: "Anslag" = Setup, "Præsentation" = Presentation, "Uddybning" = Elaboration, Point of no return = Point of no return, "Optrapning" = Escalation, "Klimaks" = Climax, "Udtoning" = Fade-out.)

When considering the progression of a narrative over time during a campaign, we can turn to a model of narrative plot structure (Model 1 – this version of the model is drawn from film studies, yet it relates to narratives in most traditional genres) to illustrate how the progression, or flow, in a fictional story could be seen as moving through a specific structure towards a climax. The narrative structure has different points often described as plot points, where the story takes a significant turn, either towards a new direction in the plot, or an increase in the level of tension. The audience is ideally drawn further into the fictional narrative as it progresses through the line of the model. Similarly, a presidential campaign can be seen as containing these plot points over the course of a campaign cycle. Of course, a campaign or candidate cannot control what occurs during an election period in as strict a fashion as an author can with a fictional, closed plot of a film, book, or theatrical play. The narrative of a political campaign must instead be flexible enough to incorporate elements of surprise, or at least anticipate challenges to the narrative themes of a candidate, such as Barack Obama's relationship to Reverend Jeremiah Wright in the 2008 election.

If one considers the textbook narrative model above, it illustrates the overall plot points in an election period. The "setup" is the candidate's announcement to run for the presidency. This event, and the speech given at it, has to create an immediate interest in the candidate, a "point

of entry onto the national stage”, as historian Evan Cornog describes the speech situation in *The Power and the Story* (Cornog, 2004, p. 12). This is followed by a period of further “presentation” of the candidate’s presidential and personal themes through additional speeches, ad campaigns, and debates. The “elaboration” of this presentation takes place during the primary season, where the candidate has to address specific audiences across the states and deal with both losses and wins on the different primary election nights. Ideally, the campaign will gain greater engagement with the voters during this period as tensions rise and fall with the state level primaries.

“The point of no return” for the candidate in a U.S. presidential election is the nomination as the party’s candidate at the national convention for the Republican or Democratic Party. After the conventions there is no dropping out gracefully for the candidates nominated to represent the two major political parties in the general election¹⁰⁰. The voters in the primaries will have to stick with the candidate chosen for their party, and this person’s narrative, throughout the general election period.

At this point, the election moves to the national stage and the engagement level should continue to ‘escalate’ with rallies, presidential debates, and get-out-the-vote operations leading to the climax of election night. The ‘climax’ of the campaign narrative is the announcement of the victory or defeat by the media followed by the victory/concession speech on election night. The protagonist, in the shape of the candidate, either achieves the goal of becoming president or bows out gracefully after a loss. Either way the candidates begin a transition process from the campaign towards presidency/citizenship and the post-election period. At this point in the above model there is a clear difference between the progression of the fictional narrative that it represents and the overall narrative of a political campaign. The “fadeout” cannot be as final as it is with a fictional narrative that provides the audience with closure, after a brief moment of ‘ultimate bliss’, since a political narrative needs a more open-ended approach to its structure to keep the electorate engaged¹⁰¹.

¹⁰⁰ An example of the problems with such a late dropout is the selection of Thomas Eagleton as VP candidate by George McGovern in the 1972 election cycle. After the nomination at the convention, Eagleton was revealed to have undergone electro chock therapy for clinical depression, and eventually he was dropped by McGovern. This move was highly criticized by the Republicans and used as proof of McGovern’s inability as a decision maker.

¹⁰¹ The approach to the fadeout of the campaign narrative was handled differently by the Obama campaigns in 2008 and 2012 respectively. Following the 2008 election, the Obama campaign’s large grass roots organization was left behind as the Obama administration was formed. The administration thereby missed the opportunity to keep the voters engaged in politics at the same level, as they had been during the campaign (Dickinson, 2012). The connection to these dedicated voters has been more consistent following the 2012 election.

The point of going through this model of dramatic fiction is to show how well a campaign cycle fits within such a rudimentary model of narrative structure. The pattern of the campaign cycle reveals the almost natural progression in suspense that occurs from a candidate announces his run to election night. A presidential administration period on the other hand does not present as smooth a progression for the protagonist, or the narrative themes of his rhetoric. The ups and downs – and especially lulls – in political deliberation are harder to incorporate into a narrative plot that can appeal to its audience or the media¹⁰². Gone is the clear path to the climax containing a winner between two challengers on election night. A political victory for a president is often one of compromise, and has a less clear and immediate outcome. For every bill signed, there may have been a loophole added, an exemption thinning out the purpose of the bill, or it can take years before the voters themselves feel the effect of the bill. The moral aspects of the narratives told move into gray areas along with the politicians making the deals, and the clear-cut narrative themes of the campaign are shaded with doubt, or tainted through a sense of glossing over contradictions, if such occur.

History of Presidential Campaigns and National Conventions

The above is an example of why and how presidential candidates are challenged on their narratives by the shift from campaign to political office and back again. There are further distinctions to be made between campaign rhetoric and presidential rhetoric, with advantages and disadvantages. Yet the two speaker positions of presidential candidate and president have in some ways come closer to each other over the years. Today the term “perpetual campaign” is often used to describe how American politics function, even when the elections are over, since the next election is already on the horizon for the incumbent. According to scholars such as Roderick Hart the positive aspect of this emphasis on campaigns in U.S. politics is that the frame of a political campaign can be seen as an engaged conversation between the candidate and the nation. Hart has described the campaign cycle as a rare moment for the voters to be actively invested as citizens in politics (Hart, 2000). His argument is that campaigns are places that make the citizens more active in the public sphere, as the campaigns create an understanding of larger institutions in a time where there is a great lack of trust in these institutions (Hart, 2000).

¹⁰² Consider, for instance, the news media’s post-election night hunger for more election news, when they are ready to get started on the next election almost immediately after the present one is over with.

Hart's idea of the modern political campaign as an extended conversation between the candidate and the nation is, however, not shared by all scholars working on campaign rhetoric. Instead, the term "weapons of mass seduction"¹⁰³ has been used to describe the rhetoric of the candidates and their campaigns in the contest setting of the election cycle. Rather than truthful conversations, distortions of political opinions and personal character traits are used strategically throughout the election cycle.

This highly competitive approach to deciding who should be president in the United States was not the original intention of the format for the presidential election. Nor did the initial elections take place as they do today. Following the constitution of the United States there were no public campaigns by candidates for the presidential office, as we know them today, and to begin with, neither were there parties that fielded individual candidates. Yet already in President Washington's farewell address in 1797, after his second term as president, Washington warned of the influence political parties could have on the system of government. President Washington equated their presence with the problems of factious politics in Congress. President Jefferson followed up on this view in his inaugural address following the 1800 election, as Evan Cornog describes the thinking at the time: "For both Republicans and Federalists, a faction was not a legitimate opposition or an expression of one point of view on a matter about which reasonable men could differ. Rather, a faction was simply a group placing its own private interests ahead of the common good. To Jefferson, all Americans should be dedicated to the common good, as long as he was allowed to define it and to determine the measures that would secure it." (Cornog, 2004, p. 126) At the time, the solution for avoiding this system of political faction was seen as lying in a selection of men of virtue to office (Schwartz, 1986)¹⁰⁴.

This emphasis on the virtuous character of the candidates for office created the longstanding tradition of candidates not actively, at least in the eyes of the public, seeking the office as president, as was discussed in the chapter on narratives and presidential rhetoric. Rather the campaign had to come to the presidential candidate with an offer of the candidature. The "Front porch campaign" of President William McKinley in 1896 can be seen as a famous example of how this kind of pseudo-non-campaigning developed into a near art-form. As a candidate McKinley opted to stay at his

¹⁰³ The title of a conference on presidential rhetoric held in Middelburg, Holland and Ghent, Belgium in 2013.

¹⁰⁴ The development of the party system has also played a significant role in the presidential elections. The identity of parties, were instrumental for instance in the 'winner takes all system' of the U.S. presidential election which has essentially eliminated minor parties from the presidential election in modern times.

home throughout the campaign period, and instead he hosted a growing number of guests arriving at his house from different parts of the country to show him their support (Harpine, 2000). These events were then reported in newspapers and in this way helped spread the knowledge of McKinley's candidature to the rest of the nation. McKinley's Democratic opponent, William Jennings Bryan, in contrast, went on a prolonged whistle stop tour and spoke to crowds across the country, yet he eventually lost the election.

A more successful example of defiance in the face of the 'tradition of the reluctant candidacy' came with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1932, Roosevelt made an unprecedented airplane trip to the Democratic Convention and acknowledged his intent in seeking the candidacy. It was an unheard gesture at the time. Roosevelt's flight was both used to show his willingness to run for office, but also his ability to take action in spite of his perceived "infirmity." (Cornog, 2004, p. 101) President F. Roosevelt's active approach to his candidature for the presidency at the convention also signified a shift in the traditions surrounding the national conventions as a whole. The presidential candidates themselves in the following years would achieve a more public role during the event compared to the role of the party itself, and the "absurd" and "foolish" tradition of the reluctant candidate, as Franklin Roosevelt described it, would disappear from the election cycle altogether (Boller, 2004, p. 233).

National Party Conventions

The National Party Convention as an event is the context of this chapter's selection of speeches, with an emphasis on Barack and Michelle Obama's convention speeches. To better understand the context that the convention speeches are given in, the historic development of the conventions is briefly discussed here. The convention format of electing a presidential candidate for the party was initiated by the Anti-masonic party in 1832 (Jones, 2009, p. 62), and was soon adopted by other contemporary political parties as they saw the benefit in a process that could produce a candidate with more unified support from the party. During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the conventions played a crucial role in electing the presidential candidate for the major political parties. Yet in the 1960s and -70s, the primary elections in the individual states took over as the event in the election cycle where the candidate for the major parties of the Democrats and the Republicans was elected. The emphasis on the primaries was seen by the campaigns of the individual candidates as a way to lessen the influence of the party establishment at the conventions, as well as avoiding the chaos of several party candidates competing among

themselves at the convention¹⁰⁵. This would thereby give more autonomy to the candidates themselves in the election process. At the 1960 Democratic National Convention, the Democratic Party members did not know who their presidential candidate would be going into the convention, since prominent political figures such as Lyndon B. Johnson and Adlai Stevenson sought to challenge the front runner from the primaries, John F. Kennedy, at the convention. The Republican Party changed their focus from the conventions to the primaries after the 1976 election, when President Gerald Ford only narrowly won against his opponent Ronald Reagan at the Republican National Convention. The last time that there was not a clear candidate at a National Party Convention for either of the major parties was in 1980, when President Jimmy Carter was challenged at the DNC by Senator Ted Kennedy.

Following this change in the election cycle, where the actual selection of a candidate was relegated to the primaries, the conventions have become more of a confirmation event for the elected candidate and a celebration of the party backing the candidate. The conventions are therefore often described as more focused on ‘image-generation’, rather than actual political debate. Yet while the visuals of campaign videos and the celebrations of party unity often fill the broadcasts covering the conventions, prominent speakers are still the main attraction for the television audience watching the conventions. Because of this emphasis on public speakers, the conventions remain interesting rhetorical situations to study when considering the use of narratives in speeches given in political contexts. The speakers in the conventions’ prime time slots on television are people at the top of the campaign ticket, people close to the candidate, or people who are somehow representative of the party’s future or past.

The content of the speeches reflect the atmosphere of coronation of the presidential candidate. Both the speeches given by the candidate’s family members and the candidate’s political allies emphasize testimonies to the character of the candidate as much as the candidate’s political achievements. In this task the candidate for the job as First Lady has received increased prominence as a speaker at the convention. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell pointed out in a chapter in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency* (1996) the first lady functions as “... a reliable sign of the values or underlying beliefs of her husband.” (Medhurst, 1996, p. 181) This is also the reason why Michelle Obama’s 2008 and 2012 DNC speeches are analyzed in detail in this chapter, alongside Barack Obama’s speeches. Because of the close personal ties to the candidate and the focus on his person

¹⁰⁵ The 1924 Democratic convention, for instance, had 123 ballots before a candidate was found.

during an election period, the epideictic parts often outweigh the deliberative parts of the speeches given at the conventions, and this presents the speakers with more opportunities for the use of narrative rhetoric as well. In fact, the narrative content and structures are often essential for the candidate, since they help define who the person behind the political messages is. Because of this emphasis on the personal character of the candidate, the event seems ripe for both cementing well-known narratives and establishing new ones if needed.

Barack Obama, for instance, made a defining impression on the Democratic Party with his 2004 convention speech, which, as we saw in an earlier chapter, focused on his unique family story as much as on any political issue. At the 2012 RNC, Republican candidate Mitt Romney opened his convention speech by stating that “Americans have a choice, a decision. To make that choice, you need to know more about me and where I’d lead our country.” (Romney, 2012) Romney then focused on a number of events in his personal past that sought to counter the critique from the media of his lack of an appealing personal character. The RNC also attempted to rectify the lack of enthusiasm for Governor Romney’s personality in the 2012 election through a convention video that focused greatly on his role as a father and caring husband. In the video, Governor Romney’s wife, Ann Romney, argued that “You can never predict what kind of tough decisions are going to come in front of a president’s desk. If you really want to know how a person will operate, look at how they’ve lived their life.”¹⁰⁶ The last sentence of this quotation from Ann Romney was spoken over a close-up image of Mitt Romney tightly surrounded by his sons.

This increased emphasis on the personality of the candidates and their families at the conventions, reflects the increased use of personal character and family references in presidential rhetoric. The tradition and structure of the conventions therefore allow for an interesting comparison between the speeches given at them over the years, when considering how the speakers describe themselves, the American people, and the United States as a nation from election cycle to election cycle.

The Context of Barack Obama’s 2008 Campaign

Before turning to the speeches of the 2008 convention, the context of the 2008 election will be addressed briefly to exemplify the constraints facing the speakers. In 2008 Barack Obama managed to create a successful blend of the presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation

¹⁰⁶ Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_cGyPwt5UI

for his speeches during the campaign. In all of the themes, the structure of the narratives was often related to the metaphor of the journey, as discussed earlier. The journey metaphor was used as an image of the campaign itself as several scholars have pointed out, among them Christian Salmon: "From the Iowa primaries onwards, Obama successfully made his personal history an integral part of the campaign and transformed the contest with Hillary Clinton into a heroic journey in search of America." (Salmon, 2010, p. 152)

Beyond the use of his narrative of self and struggle to find his own identity, Barack Obama was able to establish resonant and believable links to U.S. history in his campaign, such as a personal link to President Abraham Lincoln and that President's ability to keep the Union together during the Civil War, and a political link to the Civil Rights Movement's moral call for change. These links to historic events also occur in the historic reviews of Barack Obama's campaigns. Once Barack Obama had won the presidential election, the difficult primary campaign against Hillary Clinton seemed less so when referenced in scholarly articles dealing with the presidency of Barack Obama. Another example of this editing process by both scholars and media of Barack Obama's recent past as a politician is the rewriting of the role of Barack Obama's 2004 DNC speech. In scholarship, this speech often represents the beginning of the 2008 campaign for Barack Obama. However, the 2004 speech cannot be said to be part of the 2008 campaign, at least not when it was given, in the same way as the memoir was not part of the 2008 campaign, when it was originally written. Later both texts were incorporated in the rhetoric of Barack Obama, as awareness grew of them in the minds of the public.

The memoir and the DNC speech became clear "entry points to the national stage" for Barack Obama, as described by Cornog. The very act of narrating, in the shape of giving a speech, became a plot point in the narrative arc of Barack Obama's campaign, which he could draw upon. The telling of his personal story was an introduction to his person that went before the announcement of his presidential candidature. Because of this temporal separation between the text and his candidacy, his narrative of self could be seen as more authentic, since it was already there in the shape of his memoir and the 2004 DNC speech. In this way he strengthened his ethos early on as a national narrator capable of describing a coherent national narrative which incorporated his narrative of self and a narrative of the American people. This speaks both of the resounding political impact of the 2004 DNC speech, as well as to the idea of narratives spreading across speeches. Time was 'collapsed' between the 2004 speech and his 2007 announcement speech. In

this case the link was made between two events within Barack Obama's own life, where the events were pulled together to strengthen the narrative arc of his candidature in the 2008 election.

The Obamas in 2008

Narrative of Self and People: Barack Obama and the Americans

Barack Obama's references to his personal background are surprisingly sparse in the 2008 convention speech, particularly compared to his 2004 convention speech at the DNC. Barack Obama instead begins by referencing, rather than repeating, his narrative of self by linking the 2004 speech to the 2008 speech: "Four years ago, I stood before you and told you my story of the brief union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who weren't well off or well known, but shared a belief that in America, their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to." (Denver, 2008) The core elements in Barack Obama's narrative of self were so well known by the public by this time that Barack Obama instead focused this speech on linking his well-known narrative of self to the experiences of ordinary Americans. In one section of the 2008 convention speech, Barack Obama discussed the sacrifices and strengths of ordinary Americans and linked these Americans to his own family:

"Because, in the faces of those young veterans who come back from Iraq and Afghanistan; I see my grandfather, who signed up after Pearl Harbor, marched in Patton's army, and was rewarded by a grateful nation with the chance to go to college on the G.I. Bill. In the face of that young student, who sleeps just three hours before working the night shift, I think about my mom, who raised my sister and me on her own while she worked and earned her degree, who once turned to food stamps, but was able to send us to the best schools in the country with the help of student loans and scholarships... And when I hear a woman talk about the difficulties of starting her own business or making her way in the world, I think about my grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle management, despite years of being passed over for promotions because she was a woman... Now, I don't know what kind of lives John McCain¹⁰⁷ thinks that celebrities lead, but this has been mine. These are my heroes; theirs are the stories that shaped my life." (Denver, 2008)

Barack Obama not only speaks of the faces of Americans that he recognizes, as previous presidential candidates have spoken of in their convention speeches, Barack Obama recognizes his

¹⁰⁷ John McCain was the Republican Presidential candidate in 2008.

own family members in these faces, and in this way he is narrating a parallel story between his family and the families of the audience. With the above examples, Barack Obama's intention with the speech is revealed, since he in this speech toned down the extraordinary aspects of his narrative of self. He did not reference the goat herding of his father in Africa for instance. Instead Barack Obama sought to emphasize how his family's story resembled that of ordinary Americans: His American grandfather and other veterans, his mother and other students, his grandmother and other female entrepreneurs. His goal in this speech was not to establish identification between the audience and the extraordinary trajectory of one man and his destiny towards the White House as a fulfillment of the Civil Rights Movement, but rather his comprehension of, and experience with, the struggles of ordinary Americans. In this way Barack Obama managed to intertwine his narrative of self with the narrative of the people.

Barack Obama became directly political with these parallel narratives, as he linked his family's experiences to policy issues as well: "You know, Michelle and I are only here tonight because we were given a chance at an education... And as someone who watched my mother argue with insurance companies while she lay in bed dying of cancer, I will make certain those companies stop discriminating against those who are sick and need care the most.... And now is the time to keep the promise of equal pay for an equal day's work, because I want my daughters to have the exact same opportunities as your sons." (Denver, 2008) Barack Obama wants to show with these brief narrative sparks of his own family's experiences that he understands the real situations associated with the campaign promises given, and that legislation on the issues has a real impact on American lives, because they have had an impact on his own family's lives, and they will continue to do so, in the generation of his daughters.

While Barack Obama tones down the links to the history of the Civil Rights Movement in this speech compared to other speeches in the 2008 campaign, he still describes the 2008 campaign as a movement, rather than an ordinary political campaign: "I realize that I am not the likeliest candidate for this office. I don't fit the typical pedigree, and I haven't spent my career in the halls of Washington. But I stand before you tonight because all across America something is stirring. What the naysayers don't understand is that this election has never been about me; it's about you... And I've seen it in this campaign, in the young people who voted for the first time and the young at heart, those who got involved again after a very long time; in the Republicans who never thought they'd pick up a Democratic ballot, but did." (Denver, 2008) Here Barack Obama returns to one of his favorite narrative structures: That of the moral journey towards self-discovery. In his biography

he was discovering an identity for himself in the shadow of greater societal and racial issues in America. In the 2008 convention speech he shows that the narrative theme of inclusion of different identities in one person is no longer about his own discovery of a destiny, but about Americans discovering which journey they want to join in on along with the nation at large. Barack Obama again hands over the protagonist role to the people, rather than himself.

Barack Obama links the moment of giving the convention speech in Denver 2008 with another moment in history that has come to be synonymous with a speech. The link is made through a narrative anecdote of the Martin Luther King *I Have a Dream* speech given at the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” in 1963. Here Barack Obama’s speech does dip back into the more direct linkage between the 2008 election campaign and the Civil Rights Movement, which was absent in his references to his narrative of self in the speech:

“And it is that promise that, 45 years ago today, brought Americans from every corner of this land to stand together on a Mall in Washington, before Lincoln’s Memorial, and hear a young preacher from Georgia speak of his Dream. The men and women who gathered there could’ve heard many things. They could’ve heard words of anger and discord. They could’ve been told to succumb to the fear and frustrations of so many dreams deferred. But what the people heard instead – people of every creed and color from every walk of life – is that, in America, our destiny is inextricably linked, that together our dreams can be one. “We cannot walk alone,” the preacher cried. ”And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back.” ” (Denver, 2008)

In this anecdote of the historic moment, Barack Obama focuses more on the audience of Martin Luther King’s speech than on the famous speaker himself. Barack Obama describes the event as if moving through the crowd looking up and listening, rather than standing on the steps looking out and speaking. This focus establishes a link for the audience in the present to the audience of Martin Luther King’s speech, as much as to the words of the *I Have a Dream* speech itself. In this retelling of the moment, it is the audience, and not Martin Luther King, that is made the protagonist. This emphasis in Barack Obama’s narration of the historic moment is in tune with the rest of the 2008 DNC speech, where Barack Obama chose to focus as much on the narrative of the people as the narrative of self.

The Narrative of Nation for Barack Obama in the 2008 Convention Speech

The Narrative of Nation in this speech focuses on the promise of the United States and Barack Obama's personal narrative theme of a balanced view of government and individual responsibility. The difference in speeches at events such as the DNC often lies in the detail of the words used to describe the United States. Barack Obama's emphasis on the word 'promise', for instance, which he uses often throughout the speech, suggests a potential already present in the nation, rather than something that can be discovered or created. This entails that there is something to live up to for the current generation of Americans: "What is that American promise? It's a promise that says each of us has the freedom to make of our own lives what we will, but that we also have obligations to treat each other with dignity and respect... Ours is a promise that says government cannot solve all our problems... That's the promise of America, the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation, the fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper." (Denver, 2008) Barack Obama here relates the promise to his personal narrative theme of a shared responsibility between the individual citizen and government. This is not something he has created, but something that is a "fundamental belief". As much as freedom for the individual is part of the American promise, so is the responsibility towards other people in need of help, is Barack Obama's message.

He invokes a presidential historic link to President Kennedy to underscore the point he wants to make on responsibility for the citizens: "Democrats, we must also admit that fulfilling America's promise will require more than just money. It will require a renewed sense of responsibility from each of us to recover what John F. Kennedy called our intellectual and moral strength." (Denver, 2008) With the emphasis on promise, recovery, and the invocation of President Kennedy Barack Obama seeks to establish an understanding of the nation based on a moral obligation, rather than a pursuit of economic benefits for the individual. The engagement of the nation needs to be based on a sense of community, rather than individual opportunity.

This collective approach to progress is also reflected in Barack Obama's continued emphasis on his own family, which he in this speech perpetually links to the history and promise of the United States: "It's a promise I make to my daughters when I tuck them in at night and a promise that you make to yours, a promise that has led immigrants to cross oceans and pioneers to travel west, a promise that led workers to picket lines and women to reach for the ballot." (Denver, 2008 p. 8) From the most personal bond between parent and children in the safety of a private home, Barack Obama moves via narrative sparks through the historic trope of the immigrant journey and to the front lines of resistance in the name of social progress in the United States. By describing the

endeavors of travel and progressive protest together, Barack Obama links these events in U.S. history under the banner of the promise of America. In this way Barack Obama is also able to show a vision for the United States in his narrative of the nation, which points not only to the achievements of the past, but also towards the future, and resembles the description of the United States as an unfinished country as we saw it in the quote from the Lyndon Johnson inaugural address earlier on.

Michelle Obama 2008: Like Father, Like Husband

While Barack Obama focused on linking his family's story with that of Americans' own stories, Michelle Obama's speech at the 2008 DNC was more personally oriented. Barack Obama was at this time a national figure, and his narrative of self was well known, yet Michelle Obama was not nearly as seasoned a public speaker. Her narrative of self could therefore still be seen as containing unknown details relating to Barack Obama's personal past. Michelle Obama begins the 2008 convention speech by focusing on her different roles as sister, wife, and mother, as well as daughter. This last role moves Michelle Obama into a personal narrative about her father, whom she states was "our rock" in the family (M. Obama, 2008). Her emphasis in the description of her father is on his disease, multiple sclerosis, which he manages to overcome, as he carries on with his life and cares for his family: "He just woke up a little earlier and he worked a little harder." (M. Obama, 2008)

Michelle Obama then moves on to another important moment in her personal life for her, and for the audience, the meeting with Barack Obama. "...What struck me when I first met Barack was that even though he had this funny name, and even though he had grown up all the way across the continent in Hawaii, his family was so much like mine." (M. Obama, 2008) Here Michelle Obama adapts her narrative to the views of voters hearing of Barack Obama for the first time. By acknowledging his peculiar sounding name, and that thinking it was a "funny name" as something even she did, she reassures the audience that although Barack Obama may seem to have a strange background and name, he is just like ordinary Americans, as she continues: "Barack and I were raised with so many of the same values..." (M. Obama, 2008) The meeting of the first couple is an important narrative to tell for the first lady candidate in general, since it functions as an entry point for the nation into the relationship of the first couple, past and present. With Bill and Hillary Clinton, for instance, it was a meeting of kindred spirits and fellow 'go-getters' where the power

balance was described as equal¹⁰⁸. With Michelle Obama, her focus is on her realization of similarities with Barack Obama in spite of his seemingly foreign background and name, which can be seen as part of Barack Obama's personal theme of communal inclusion.

Michelle Obama's most personally expressed narrative about Barack Obama is saved for an anecdote at the end of the speech, where she speaks about Barack Obama being the same person in spite of the long campaign for the presidency:

"And in the end, after all that's happened these past 19 months, see, the Barack Obama I know today is the same man I fell in love with 19 years ago. He's the same man who drove me and our new baby daughter home from the hospital 10 years ago this summer, inching along at a snail's pace – peering at us anxiously, through the rearview mirror, feeling the whole weight of her future in his hands, determined to give her everything he'd struggled so hard for himself, determined to give her something he never had: the affirming embrace of a father's love." (M. Obama, 2008)

This brief anecdote places Barack Obama in the role of the common man, through the intimacy of being alone with his first child and the mother of the child. The anecdote also establishes a parallel between Barack Obama and Michelle Obama's own father, and the father's positive attributes of responsibility and sacrifice.

Family Matters

The speeches of the Obamas¹⁰⁹ complimented each other at the 2008 DNC by focusing on the parallels between themselves and other American families, and more personally with a connection between Michelle Obama's father and Barack Obama. Where the John and Theresa

¹⁰⁸ The meeting is described in the 1992 DNC video *The Man from Hope*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LntAEHG5vA>

¹⁰⁹ Barack Obama's Sister Maya Soetoro-Ng also spoke at the 2008 Democratic Convention. Her speech was short, but poignant for the dissertation's emphasis on narrative rhetoric, since Soetoro-Ng's main message was a description of her closest family as storytellers. The mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, is directly called a "storyteller" in the speech, and Barack Obama is linked to the mother through a parallel to the mother's ability to open the world for others around her. Soetoro-Ng adopted the generational narrative theme by focusing on the communality established through storytelling, which Barack Obama also focused on in his memoir. The emphasis in Soetoro-Ng's speech was placed on the ritual of storytelling in a family as much as on the content of the narratives being told. The mother is described in the following way: "Above all, she was a storyteller. She told us tales from history about heroism in the face of injustice, about beauty breaking through darkness... In these interconnected times, we need stories. Like our mother, Barack opened my mind and spirit to a broader world." (Soetoro-Ng, 2008) Soetoro-Ng includes herself in the family of storytellers by emphasizing that she herself has also taken up the storyteller baton: "As a U.S. history teacher, I try to make our country's fascinating story leap from the page for my students." (Soetoro-Ng, 2008) Soetoro-Ng adds another layer to the communal storytelling practice of a family by describing how education was also instrumental in helping her family become storytellers. Her role as a history teacher parallels Barack Obama's personal narrative theme of the importance of understanding one's history to understand one's identity.

Kerry at the 2004 convention, for instance, drew strength from their service to their nation abroad in the light of a military context, the Obamas found strength at home, literally, as their narrative anecdotes and sparks emphasized closeness of family and sacrifice for the generations. Michelle Obama also focused on balancing out the ‘unlikely’ family story of Barack Obama with a more traditional tale of upbringing. This balance has also been picked up by Bonnie Dow in an analysis of the media reception of Michelle Obama in the 2008 election, where Dow points out that: “... her idyllic upbringing functions as a counterweight to President Obama’s much less traditional background as the product of a mixed race marriage, a broken home and an absent father...” (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 245)

The focus on the journey metaphor for the campaign was also present in the speeches, yet the metaphor was more for the audience themselves than for Barack Obama at this point. While Barack Obama tried to ‘share the glory’ with the voters in his speeches during the 2008 campaign, the responsibility of fulfilling the “promise of America”, however, would still rest heavily on his shoulders after his successful election to presidency in 2008.

The Context of the 2012 campaign

The First Four Years in Office and the Meaning of Incumbency for President Obama

President Obama rode into the White House on high expectations following the climactic end to the 2008 election. While he, during the first two years in office, had the advantage of a Democratic majority in both chambers of Congress there were still challenges to be met. Events such as the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony showed the high expectations to his presidency, as discussed in the previous chapter. The reactions to the prize being given so early to President Obama could also be seen as a manifestation of the doubt that President Obama would be able to follow up his visionary words with similarly stirring initiatives and legislative proposals. After the election, President Obama quickly moved from charismatic campaign oratory to a more pragmatic ‘work-mode’ in his rhetoric. *President* Obama’s narrative of self became one of a centrist politician on both economic and security issues. This seemed to fit with the personal narrative theme of inclusion of communities from Barack Obama’s own background, and his political supporters accepted this description of his presidency. President Obama’s political opponents, however, portrayed him as (far) left of center, as we saw an example of with the D’Souza biography of Barack Obama. There were also continuous campaigns that expressed doubts about Barack Obama’s true birthplace, dubbed the ‘birther movement’. In these ways the personal side of Barack

Obama's identity as president stayed in the realm of competitive narratives, rather than settling in on one version of his person and politics.

Another issue to consider for the first presidential period of Barack Obama was the international relations for the United States and the nation's standing in the world. China, Russia and emerging economies around the world continued to challenge U.S. superiority in different regions. The Middle East witnessed a wide spread regional uprising with the Arab Spring beginning in 2011, which continues to reverberate through the countries affected. These international developments presented President Obama with a number of constraints in his rhetoric on foreign affairs, but also gave him opportunities to speak on behalf of the United States in different ways than his immediate predecessor had done on an international stage. We saw this in the speeches dealt with in the previous chapter on President Obama's interpretation of the narrative theme of nation.

While the above issues point to the many challenges an incumbent president often faces during re-election, President Obama's incumbency also presented a number of advantages for the sitting president in the 2012 election. For President Obama the advantages even seemed to outweigh the negative sides of having presided over the executive branch of the United States' government for nearly four years.

One advantage for a sitting president is the increased number of epideictic speeches they are able to give while in office – a turnaround from the expected role of the president on the public speaking stage in the 19th century. These situations allow the president to prove that he can pass the 'presidential bar' (Herron, 2012), the mold the public has in their view of what it takes to be president. The incumbent has, hopefully, been able to meet this presidential bar on several occasions, where he has sounded and looked presidential, while the opponent in the election has not had similar opportunities to show the nation that he/she can pass the bar.

President Obama was able to fill the 'comforter-in-chief' role, and through it passed the presidential bar on several occasions, when it was needed in connection with the school shootings and other mass shooting incidents that took place during his presidency, as well as in connection with Hurricane Sandy striking the Eastern Coast of the United States during the final days of the 2012 election cycle. In these instances, President Obama was able to show empathy in public speeches, where Mitt Romney did not have the same opportunities. Governor Romney was ultimately not able to counter the narrativization of his impersonal approach to business, politics, and by extension, human relations. This reflected an emphasis on the two candidates' ability to show empathy. The positive side of the focus on empathy for the election cycle, if we consider the

electorate's view of the proceedings, was a fight to understand the people's needs in the speeches and debates of the candidates. The negative side was an even greater emphasis on the personality of the candidates rather than their politics.

Critique of Barack Obama's Leadership Style - the Professorial President

The distant professor image was part of the critique geared towards President Obama by both the media and by scholars during his first administration period, along with his failure to deliver on key policy proposals of his 2008 campaign. What seemed to frustrate people about Barack Obama was the same thing he was elected on: His willingness to hear all parties on an issue, and his effort, even need, to achieve a broad consensus on legislation. This often led to an image of indecision in the executive office of President Obama with the media, the public, and scholars: "President Obama was for instance not a good manager of the process around the Affordable Care Act in 2010 and the NSA scandal after the 2012 election. President Obama failed to find a way to talk to the Hill, and he failed to find a way to talk to the Republicans, and gridlock ensued. This gridlock not only occurred because of the Tea Party, but also from the inability of President Obama to cut to the chase." (Kennard, 2013) President Obama's foreign policy was not described much more positively: "Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Egypt. These are places that are going wrong." (Kennard, 2013) Yet in many of these discussions, the policy failures were only partly ascribed to President Obama's abilities to act on the issues. In the media and scholarly writings on President Obama's political troubles during his first administration period, there was almost always a caveat, where blame was also placed on the domestic and international political environments he found himself in as president. In this sense, there was still a respect for his abilities as speaker and the presidency as a powerful speaking position.

President Obama's Progressive Agenda in the 2012 Campaign

Perhaps the most significant rhetorical change that President Obama made in his campaign strategy in 2012 compared to 2008, was a greater emphasis on political progressive action rather than moral progressive action in his speeches. His 2008 campaign had gained momentum by linking itself to the history of the Civil Rights Movement, and through this link Barack Obama had claimed a moral aspect to his campaign. President Obama became more of a 'class warrior' in 2012, where he at times was less conciliatory in his rhetoric, after his own political setbacks and disappointments in the period between the elections. President Obama narrated this shift from moral vision towards

political progressivism by using another historic link. This time, it was to the early 20th-century progressivism and to President Theodore Roosevelt through a historic presidential link. President Obama's unofficial kick-off speech for the 2012 campaign was given in the small town of Osawatomie near Kansas City in December 2011. Geographical context played a role for the speech, since it was the same place where President Theodore Roosevelt presented his "Square Deal" a hundred years earlier. The White House homepage even posted President Theodore Roosevelt's speech with President Obama's speech to underline the parallel.¹¹⁰.

The class-aspect of President Barack Obama's rhetoric could also be seen as a reaction to research showing the United States becoming an increasingly unequal society in terms of wealth distribution, which has been summarized in recent publications such as a popular book by economic historian Thomas Piketty, which carries a title that calls to mind class struggle in and of itself: *Capital in the 21st Century* (Piketty, 2014). President Obama sought guidance with other historians on how to address this issue without being seen as an agitator for class warfare (Remnick, 2014). One solution, clearly chosen in his speeches, seemed to be an even greater emphasis on links between his own family life and the lives of ordinary middle class families in America. Yet instead of focusing on only a nurturing aspect of the family, an economic aspect was also emphasized in the narratives of the Obamas' life as a family in the 2012 speeches.

In terms of sustaining narrative longevity, the link between the Obama family and American families focused on a narrative that described the years spent in the White House as not changing the dynamics or the values of the Obama family. This, for instance, was exemplified by the references made to President Obama and Michelle Obama's student debt in several speeches, which had only been paid off just before the first bid for the presidency. This focus on President Obama as the 'common man' and a family man was also one reason why prominent speakers such as President Bill Clinton stepped in at the 2012 DNC to say that "I want a President who had the good sense to marry Michelle Obama". Yet where President Obama in 2008 had been seen as almost perfectly in tune with the zeitgeist, and the leader of a movement for change, he was lagging in 2012. His presidential persona in the media had become that of an observer rather than that of a doer.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/12/06/archives-president-teddy-roosevelts-new-nationalism-speech>

2012 Convention Speeches

Narrative of Self for Barack Obama in 2012: Being President

Barack Obama once again references the 2004 convention speech in his 2012 convention speech. This time he uses the eight-year-old speech to emphasize the change he has undergone as a person. “Now, the first time I addressed this convention in 2004, I was a younger man...” (Charlotte, 2012) This development is the main change that runs through the theme of the narrative of self in the 2012 convention speeches compared to the speeches of Barack and Michelle Obama at the 2008 convention. It is the change needed to maintain narrative fidelity and coherence and establish narrative longevity. The presidency has now become part of President Obama’s narrative of self, and he can refer to it directly in the speech. President Obama speaks directly about his role as president near the end of the speech:

“You know, I recognize that times have changed since I first spoke to this convention. Times have changed and so have I. I’m no longer just a candidate: I’m the President... that means I know what it means to send young Americans into battle, for I’ve held in my arms the mothers and fathers of those who didn’t return. I’ve shared the pain of families who’ve lost their homes, and the frustration of workers who’ve lost their jobs. If the critics are right that I’ve made all my decisions based on polls, then I must not be very good at reading them.” (Charlotte, 2012)

Here again President Obama is focused on the responsibility of the office, when he refers to himself. In this narration of moments with grieving Americans, he emphasizes a focus on people rather than politics, and summarizes it with an emphasis on the challenges of being a president in the public eye. What is interesting in this description of his own role as president is also that he returns to referencing President Lincoln through a presidential link that aims to point out President Obama’s own fallibility: “... I’m far more mindful of my own failings – knowing exactly what Lincoln meant when he said, “I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had no place else to go.” ” (Charlotte, 2012) Although this may seem as a move towards humility for President Obama, the invocation of President Lincoln’s words suggests that what he is also concerned with here is an emphasis on the heavy burden of the office, the responsibility that weighs on him due to it, as it weighed on President Lincoln during the Civil War. The electorate and party should take this into account, when judging his performance in the upcoming election.

President Obama also continues to link his own family with the values of his campaign: “Ours is a fight to restore the values that built the largest middle class and the strongest economy

the world has ever known – the values my grandfather defended as a soldier in Patton’s army, the values that drove my grandmother to work on a bomber assembly line while he was gone.”

(Charlotte, 2012) Again Barack Obama begins his narrative of self with his grandparents rather than his parents: “They knew they were part of something larger – a nation that triumphed over fascism and depression, a nation where the most innovative businesses turned out the world’s best products, and everyone shared in that pride and success – from the corner office to the factory floor. My grandparents were given the chance to go to college, buy their own home, and fulfill the basic bargain at the heart of America’s story: the promise that hard work will pay off, that responsibility will be rewarded, that everyone gets a fair shot, and everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same rules – from Main Street to Wall Street to Washington, D.C.” (Charlotte, 2012)

This quotation is an example of how presidential rhetoric not only reveals the intentions of the candidate speaking the words. The rhetoric used also reveals popular expressions and thematic focal points at the times the speeches are given. As a contemporary president, Barack Obama still often refers to the generational narrative that includes the ‘greatest generation’ of Americans, who faced the Great Depression and the Second World War. Because of the popularity of this period in the public memory of the American people, President Obama can be seen focusing heavily on his grandparents, and their story, which almost stands in for his own narrative of self in the speech. Theirs are lived lives that can be comprehended more easily in clearly defined challenges and triumphs, while President Obama, entangled in the responsibilities of the presidency, is still in the middle of complicated political issues that do not benefit from the clarity of time gone by. His time as president is therefore not as readily available to structure a narrative around.

Narrative of People: The People in the Light of the Economic Crisis

It is not only President Obama that has changed during the years in the White House, according the President Obama in the 2012 speech. The American people have also undergone a development in the light of the economic crisis they have had to face during President Obama’s years in office. President Obama uses his narrative of the people in the 2012 convention speech to promote these changes that have occurred during his presidency. The positive changes are not a result of the administration’s work, but through the electorate’s own choices, which provides agency to the people as characters. Thereby President Obama seeks to connect his two presidential campaigns by a narrative of the people, which focuses on the empowerment of the electorate: “So you see, the election four years ago wasn’t about me. It was about you. My fellow citizens: You

were the change. You're the reason there's a young girl with a heart disorder in Phoenix who'll get the surgery she needs because an insurance company can't limit her coverage. You did that. You're the reason a young man in Colorado who never thought he'd be able to afford his dream of earning a medical degree is about to get that chance. You made that possible. You're the reason a young immigrant who grew up here and went to school here and pledged allegiance to our flag will no longer be deported from the only country she's ever called home; why selfless soldiers won't be kicked out of the military because of who they are or who they love; why thousands of families have finally been able to say to the loved ones who served us so bravely: "Welcome home." Welcome home. You did that. You did that. You did that." (Charlotte, 2012) Through this long list of narrative sparks, which describes Americans experiencing America under the Obama administration, President Obama hands over the achievements of his administration to the American people, and instead frames the achievements as something every American has had a hand in by voting in the previous election.

President Obama continues this focus on the narrative of the people by telling about different individuals that have given him hope with their actions during his presidency: "The young woman I met at a science fair who won national recognition for her biology research while living with her family at a homeless shelter – she gives me hope. The auto worker who won the lottery after his plant almost closed, but kept coming to work every day... The family business in Warroad, Minnesota, that didn't lay off a single one of their 4,000 employees when the recession hit... they gave me hope." (Charlotte, 2012) All of these people have found a way to work through adversity, and have acted in ways not expected of them. President Obama ends this list of narrative sparks with a narrative anecdote of a "young sailor" (Charlotte, 2012), which is given more space than the stories preceding it in the speech. The sailor, with his story of learning to use his artificial legs, is used as a synecdoche for the United States learning to stand on its own legs again. What these references to individual Americans also signify is President Obama's own challenges as president, where he has experienced an environment that has not always been responsive to his goals and suggestions. In spite of this environment, he has carried on, inspired by the Americans who have done the same, and risen from the knees President Obama himself had knelt to, in similar fashion as President Lincoln.

The Obamas: The Generational Narrative Still Present in Michelle Obama's 2012 Convention Speech

President Obama's wife, Michelle Obama, continues to function as a witness to Barack Obama's life in her 2012 speech, as she did in the 2008 speech. Michelle Obama once again begins her speech with an emphasis on her father, where she presents herself as a witness to her father's physical struggle and his unabated sense of responsibility towards his job and his family. The change between the speeches, from 2008 to 2012, is towards an even more detailed narration of her father's struggles:

"I knew there were plenty of mornings when it was a struggle for him to simply get out of bed. But every morning, I watched my father wake up with a smile, grab his walker, prop himself up against the bathroom sink, and slowly shave and button his uniform. And when he returned home after a long day's work my brother and I would stand at the top of the stairs to our little apartment, patiently waiting to greet him... watching as he reached down to lift one leg, and then the other, to slowly climb his way into our arms. But despite these challenges, my dad hardly ever missed a day of work ... he and my mom were determined to give me and my brother the kind of education they could only dream of... You see, for my dad, that's what it meant to be a man." (M. Obama, 2012)

Michelle Obama returns to her childhood self in this anecdote of her father's daily life with a debilitating disease. The descriptions are both intimate with details of even her father's morning routine, as well as placing Michelle Obama directly in the narrative in the role of the witness, as she "watched" her father's pained walk up the stairs. These different settings and daily rituals are used by Michelle Obama to emphasize the kind of struggle her father was facing, but the detail with which they are presented are also used to show that Michelle Obama still remembers the life of a middle class American family, even though she has been living in the White House since 2009.

Michelle Obama introduces Barack Obama's grandmother as a parallel character to her own father and his values and approach to life. Thereby Michelle Obama once again connects *her* own personal past with that of Barack Obama's. Where the challenge in Michelle Obama's father's life was his illness, the challenge for Barack Obama's Grandmother was that of gender inequality in the workplace: "Barack's grandmother started out as a secretary at a community bank... and she moved quickly up the ranks... but like so many women, she hit a glass ceiling. And for years, men no more qualified than she was – men she had actually trained – were promoted up the ladder ahead of her, earning more and more money while Barack's family continued to scrape by. But day after day, she kept on waking up at dawn to catch the bus... arriving at work before anyone else ... giving her best without complaint or regret. And she would often tell Barack, "So long as you kids do well,

Bar, that's all that really matters." " (M. Obama, 2012) Michelle Obama uses these stories of the grandparents and parents of her and Barack Obama to exemplify the first couple's roots in ordinary American family lives, where the common goal is to improve the life of the family rather than the individual. The means for this improvement is dogged persistence through daily routines, rather than individual genius or exceptionality.

Michelle Obama continues this linkage to ordinary American life and values with her narration of the relationship between herself and Barack Obama. In the 2012 version of this narrative of everyday life, the emphasis has moved from the birth of their first child to Michelle and Barack as parents:" While I believed deeply in my husband's vision for this country... and I was certain he would make an extraordinary president... like any mother, I was worried about what it would mean for our girls if he got that chance. How would we keep them grounded under the glare of the national spotlight? How would they feel being uprooted from their school, their friends, and the only home they'd ever known? Our life before moving to Washington was filled with simple joys... Saturday at soccer games, Sunday's at grandma's house ... and a date night for Barack and me was either dinner or a movie, because as an exhausted mom, I couldn't stay awake for both." (M. Obama, 2012)

Michelle Obama does not describe life in the White House as a dream come true. Rather it was the life for the family before the election victory in 2008 that seems dreamlike in Michelle Obama's rendition of 'simple joys' in the 2012 speech. Michelle Obama continues this normalization process of the first couple by pointing out that they were in debt for a long time due to their student loans, connecting them to the many young voters leaning towards the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. She is even humorous about the economic challenge the Obamas faced: "And believe it or not, when we were first married, our combined monthly student loan bills were actually higher than our mortgage. We were so young, so in love, and *so* in debt." (M. Obama, 2012)

Barack is Still Barack

Michelle Obama solidifies her position as witness to Barack Obama's character, by describing her view of Barack Obama as an unchanged man. In contrast to the media frenzy surrounding the election, she argues that she is able to see the real person behind the campaign politics and image making: "You see, even though back then Barack was a Senator and a presidential candidate... to me, he was still the guy who'd picked me up for our dates in a car that

was so rusted out, I could actually see the pavement going through a hole in the passenger side door... he was the guy whose proudest possession was a coffee table he'd found in a dumpster, and whose only pair of decent shoes was half a size too small." (M. Obama, 2012) Again the details of the economic aspect of their earlier life are used to argue the truthfulness in the present day politician's agenda. Barack Obama has lived a life outside of Washington and with the same lack of material wealth as many Americans have experienced. The argument becomes that, because of these similar experiences, his policies also have the ordinary Americans in mind.

While it is important to present Barack Obama as the ordinary man he was, and how he still possesses the values from a less affluent past, it is also important for Michelle Obama to present him as the extraordinary man who is capable of doing the job as president, as he has done for the past four years. Barack Obama as president is therefore the main character for Michelle Obama to describe in this speech. Michelle Obama has witnessed how President Obama has handled the job, and she connects the requirements of the job to the personality of the president: "Well, today after so many struggles and triumphs and moments that have tested my husband in ways I never could have imagined, I have seen firsthand that being president doesn't change who you are – it *reveals* who you are. You see, I've gotten to see up close and personal what being a president really looks like. And I've seen how the issues that come across a President's desk are always the hard ones... But at the end of the day, when it comes time to make that decision, as President, all you have to guide you are your values, and your vision, and the life experiences that make you who you are." (M. Obama, 2012)

And this essential trait of President Obama, his character, is what Michelle Obama reaffirms here: "So when people ask me whether being in the White House has changed my husband, I can honestly say that when it comes to his character, and his convictions, and his heart, Barack Obama is still the same man I fell in love with all those years ago. He's the same man who started his career by turning down high paying jobs and instead worked in struggling neighborhoods where a steel plant had shut down... He's the same man who, when our girls were first born, would anxiously check their cribs every few minutes to ensure they were still breathing, proudly showing them off to everyone we knew. That's the man who sits down with me and our girls for dinner nearly every night, patiently answering their questions about issues in the news, and strategizing about middle school friendships. That's the man I see in those quiet moments late at night, hunched over his desk, poring over the letters people have sent him." (M. Obama, 2012) Here Michelle Obama focuses on two sides of Barack Obama's pre-presidential life: His work ethic and his role as a father. Both

sides are used to exemplify Barack Obama's empathy for others, either the people he worked with as community organizer or his own daughters. The same concern, it is indicated, is given to the American people, where Barack Obama, instead of checking on a crib, sits in quiet moments and checks on the American people through the letters they send him. President Obama has even been able to maintain his role as concerned father, as described by Michelle Obama, where he has maintained the balancing act between his identities of President and father. The roles even intersect for President Obama, with a word such as "strategizing" used to describe not the work of the president on a political issue, but in connection with one of their daughters' private life.

Conclusion

While the Obamas' convention speeches in 2012 were developed to incorporate the four years that had passed since the 2008 speeches, the 2012 speeches still emphasized presidential narrative themes such as the narrative of self. President Obama actually became more personal in the 2012 speech than he had been in his 2008 speech, with an emphasis on his personal experiences as president. He still maintained his personal narrative theme of generational progress through a focus on his grandparents rather than his parents. In both speeches, Barack Obama focused as much on the narrative theme of the people as on his narrative of self. He sought to intertwine the two narrative themes in the speeches, rather than set himself apart from the people through his extraordinary background, which was used more directly in the 2004 convention speech, and indirectly in the 2008 election. Nor did Barack Obama emphasize his experiences as president in a way that could be distinguished directly from the ordeals facing a responsible working middle class father worried about the demands of his work and his family's wellbeing. The enormous responsibility of the office was primarily left to others to describe, and only mentioned by Barack Obama in historic links to previous presidents, such as Abraham Lincoln.

The intertwining of the narratives of self and of people helped establish narrative arcs for both Barack Obama and the American people that could span the four years spent in office. The challenges for both Barack Obama as president and the challenges still facing the American people were shown as being linked. President Obama had seen several severe setbacks to his policy agenda, which also challenged the narrative fidelity of his personal narrative themes, such as the inclusion of political parties, and the relationship between government and individual citizens in the United States. Yet because of his intertwining of the narrative of self and of the people, he was able to maintain a message of inclusion in spite of the decreased political aspect of this particular

narrative theme in relation to Congress. His personal narrative theme of a balanced responsibility between the individual and government, however, remained in place, and was even enforced actively at times by his rhetoric, when it came under fire from his political opponents.

The personal narrative of Michelle Obama's convention speeches also reflected the change that had occurred for Barack Obama, as he became president. Yet there was a clear distinction between the changes in outer circumstance for her husband with the job as the president, compared to how the 'core' of the man had not changed. Often Michelle Obama transferred her admiration for her own father, or her love for Barack Obama as a husband, to his role as president and the work done through the presidency. In this way the personal view of a close witness to the presidency was emphasized in Michelle Obama's speeches, where the narrative of self of Barack Obama from his memoir and early speeches was confirmed in spite of the many new contextual developments.

In this sense, the description of Barack Obama's identity moved from the focus on an intricate amalgam of different backgrounds in the 2008 campaign, which was capable of establishing consubstantiality with a majority of Americans, to a more sturdy approach to his identity in the 2012 campaign. His role as a family father was more pronounced in the 2012 speeches. The narratives of fatherhood were used to show character growth for Barack Obama as he went from being the nervous father of a child to the responsible father figure of a nation. This focus sought to establish coherence in his narrative of self by describing his role as president as an extension of his identity as a hardworking and caring family father. Barack Obama as speaker and narrator in these speeches once again adjusted to a new environment (The White House), but he also maintained a more solidified narrative of self, and the speeches sought to tie the ideals of the older generations of Michelle Obama's father and Barack Obama's grandmother even closer to the president.

The narrative approach in this chapter to the convention speeches has helped further the definitions of the personal themes for Barack Obama in the presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012. The approach has also been able to show how Barack Obama attempted to maintain central elements in the personal narrative themes such as the focus on his grandparents, while including new perspectives, such as the responsibility of the presidency. These changes could propose great challenges if they were established in his narrative themes without a thought to coherence and fidelity. Yet by maintaining specific parts of a narrative arc for Barack Obama personally, and the American people nationally, the changes were incorporated without being rejected outright by the electorate. The emphasis on a 'good man doing his best in spite of problems' could resonate with

the fact that Barack Obama as a person was less criticized than Barack Obama as a political leader according to the poll numbers¹¹¹. By focusing on both sides of this split in the public perception of Barack Obama in the development of the presidential and personal narrative themes, the speeches of Barack and Michelle Obama allowed people to continue to identify and find meaning in the narrative themes of Barack Obama's rhetoric in the 2012 election.

¹¹¹ The uniqueness of Barack Obama's presidency was also reflected in the RNC speeches by Mitt Romney and VP candidate Paul Ryan in 2012. All of the speeches made sure to acknowledge the historic significance of Barack Obama's election in 2008, and that they were not speaking against his person but his policies. Mitt Romney: "Four years ago, I know that many Americans felt a fresh excitement about the possibilities of a new President." (Romney, 2012) Paul Ryan: "My home state voted for President Obama. When he talked about change, many people liked the sound of it, especially in Janesville..." (Ryan, 2012)

Chapter 8. Conclusion

The rhetoric of a U.S. president offers a unique and personalized glimpse into the American national conversation. A conversation which is ongoing on both the issues of the day as well as longer term historical shifts in values and in matters of how to govern its people, as President Obama himself describes it: "... a nation arguing with its conscience." (Obama, 2008, p. 437) Presidential rhetoric should in this light also be seen as evolving rather than static. For these reasons, presidential rhetoric has been a particularly appropriate field to dive into when considering the content and form of narratives in politically oriented rhetoric. In their rhetoric, U.S. presidents have had to deal with both agenda setting and the long arc of history, as it bent against them or with them during their time in the White House. President Obama, with the narrative use of his personal background, his work with communal storytelling as a community organizer, and his appreciation of U.S. history and its significance for contemporary politics, has proven a giving subject for the examination of issues regarding narrative rhetoric in a political context.

The final chapter of this dissertation firstly summarizes the results yielded from this narrative analysis of presidential rhetoric and the rhetoric of President Barack Obama in particular. Implications for future studies using the concepts presented in the dissertation are also considered, as well as necessary considerations and limits in a study of a contemporary president.

Summary of Findings in the Dissertation

The context of the research done in a dissertation such as this, with as contemporary a case study as that of a sitting President, is important to consider. For instance, the perspectives of the dissertation might have been different had President Obama not won a second term in the White House in the 2012 election, which occurred during the writing of the dissertation. A president's ability to achieve longevity in the presidential and personal narrative themes is tested politically in a reelection period in a much more direct fashion than during his first term in office. The winning of a second term in office can in some ways be seen as an affirmation of a narrative fidelity achieved with a majority of the voters in the United States, at least at election time.

It will, however, take time, and through time the needed temporal distance, to see more clearly whether the established and emerging narrative themes of Barack Obama and his presidency will be sustained in the public memory after his second term in office has ended. New political dilemmas continue to arise throughout a presidency. The geopolitical crisis between the United States and Russia over the Crimean peninsula in early 2014 could, for instance, prove a significant change for

the overall foreign policy legacy of the Obama administration. On the domestic front President Obama has had crises such as the NSA-scandal to deal with, which has also impaired his role as the voice of the nation¹¹². At the same time, there is an inherent difficulty in assessing the moment of a speech's influence for a rhetorician. President Wilson's final speech on the need for an international forum for nations to negotiate in could be seen as a failure in its immediate context in 1919, since the League of Nations was established without participation from the United States. Yet the words President Wilson spoke proved to be future seeds for the formulation of the United Nations and the arguments for why the United States should become a member of that organization. A contemporary failure in communication can still end up being the voice of a historic and foundational shift in political values.

This dissertation, therefore, represents a detailed snapshot of the content of President Obama's speeches during his first four years as president, rather than a comprehensive overview of the entire Obama presidency, which is still ongoing at the time of writing. The dissertation has sought to describe a more nuanced conceptualization of narratives in presidential rhetoric for the use in rhetorical criticism. The dissertation has also considered how President Obama himself uses such narratives in his speeches. This dual aspect of rhetoric, as both a method of criticism as well as the practice of a public speaker, results in a number of conceptual suggestions for rhetorical criticism done on the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric. It also allows a number of conclusions on the presidential rhetoric of Barack Obama and his speaker position as narrator-in-chief.

In the chapter on narrative rhetoric the conceptual suggestions include: First, the need for a more detail-oriented reading of rhetorical texts, when considering what constitutes narratives. This can be done through an adaptation of the theory of "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2007) to include not only new media texts or conversational speech, but also smaller narrative structures in traditional rhetorical texts such as political speeches. The attention to what this study calls narrative sparks of words and sentences allows a greater understanding of the referential framework the speaker seeks to establish for his audience, it also emphasizes the role of activating the audience in a way that Stuckey saw lacking in previous ways of using narratives that left nothing to the imagination (Stuckey, 1991, p. 118).

Second, a consideration of narrative as a term which covers both thematic content and structural considerations in the text is of value, when trying to nuance the use of narrative as a term in

¹¹² See appendix B for a further discussion of the implications of the NSA-scandal and other issues on the narratives told by President Obama.

rhetorical criticism of political speeches. The benefit of the attention to both thematic content and narrative structures in the texts is the avoidance of the broad use of narrative as a term, which dilutes its purpose. Furthermore, by adding the attention to a thematic understanding of the purpose of narratives in political rhetoric the content of the narratives can be presented in greater detail, through an emphasis on the narrative of self, people and nation separately. The attention to narrative structures and the differences between them, such as anecdotes and sparks, can help shed more light on how a speaker actually uses narratives in a speech.

Third, beyond the basic elements presented in the definition of a narrative, such as character, setting, events, and plot, additions to these narrative elements in relation to rhetoric are also considered in the dissertation, such as the role of witness and protagonist for characters, direct and indirect references to setting, as well as parallel and collapsed plot structures. These different distinctions are also part of the attempt to nuance the use of narrative as a concept in rhetorical criticism.

Fourth, the connections between narrative as a concept and other rhetorical concepts such as constitutive rhetoric (Charland, 1987) and public memory (Jasinski, 2001) are established gradually throughout the case study chapters of the dissertation. These connections emphasize the relevance of including an understanding of narrative rhetoric as an umbrella term in rhetorical criticism of political rhetoric that deals with the use of history, as well as the formation of public audiences through a shared national identity.

In the chapter on presidential rhetoric, the above conceptual considerations were first placed within a historical context relevant to how presidents have used narratives to shore up their own public identity and the identity of their electorate. This focus on narration is reflected in the development of presidential rhetoric in terms of an increased emphasis on personal narrative themes alongside the traditional presidential narrative themes of self, people, and nation. The distinction between presidential narrative themes and personal narrative themes is one way to further establish how an individual president stands out in his use of narratives compared to other presidents. The development of more personalized themes in the narratives used by presidents in their rhetoric is also reflected in the proposal by other scholars that an increase in presidential use of epideictic speech has taken place (Stuckey, 1991; Guillaume, 2013; Ortega, 2014). In particular, Stuckey's description of a dramatized society's need for stories seems to underscore the increase in the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric as well. Yet while authors such as Stuckey, Salmon, and Hart in different publications are critical of the increased use of either storytelling or presidential rhetoric in

general (Hart, 1987, p. 41), this dissertation views the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric as containing the potential for a greater engagement of the audience as well as an educational aspect which echoes the ideas of Walter Fisher's democratic aspirations with the narrative paradigm. The president's speaker position in the midst of the increased media clutter poses great challenges to the holder of the office, but it is still a place of opportunity to speak through the clutter on issues of national interest. This also leaves a greater responsibility to the speaker, as well as to the researcher doing work on the narrative rhetoric of the presidency. The research done by other scholars on the rhetoric of Barack Obama as candidate and president, which was reviewed in the chapter on presidential rhetoric and narratives, has included narrative as a term with different intentions and results. Yet for the most part, narrative as a term in this research was broadly defined. In general, the research done on Barack Obama's and other presidents' use of narratives could therefore benefit from the more nuanced definitions of elements, themes, and structures within narrative rhetoric, presented in the chapter on the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric.

The above conceptual and contextual considerations were put to use in the case studies of Barack Obama's rhetoric and yielded the following findings, where Barack Obama was seen as both adhering to presidential traditions of narration, and differing from previous presidents in his use of narrative rhetoric.

In the chapter on Barack Obama's use of the presidential narrative theme of self, the following findings were made: First, narration in and of itself was a theme for Barack Obama in his 1995 memoir, not merely a method to present the content with. The ability to tell one's story, through a clear understanding of one's past, is essential to one's identity. This should also be seen as a significant personal narrative theme for Barack Obama as a public speaker.

Second, while one may have a particular identity for oneself in the present, based on one's understanding of the past, this identity should not be seen as complete. Rather the subjectivity of the formation of a personal identity suggests for Barack Obama a condition of perpetual change that cannot be entirely removed from his identity. This also leads to an understanding of the national conversation regarding a nation's identity as being parallel with the identity project of an individual, where both can be seen as ongoing and in perpetual motion.

In the chapter on the narrative of self it was concluded that Barack Obama directly referenced the subjectivity of storytelling. This allowed him to emphasize the very storytelling process that made him popular, and through these references to storytelling he was able to establish an identity

as a potentially more open-minded leader. Once in office, the self-conscious leadership style, however, was often interpreted as doubt in his deliberations as leader and created problems with the rest of the U.S. political system. Here President Obama has often been criticized as a leader who prefers to analyze and interpret rather than lead.

In the case-study chapter that considered Barack Obama's use of the presidential narrative theme of the people, it was found that he spoke of events and people not previously included in the description of U.S. citizenship in such detail by presidents in similar traditional speeches. Barack Obama emphasized an inclusion of Americans previously 'unspoken of', such as slaves in the topoi of American immigration and homosexuals in the narrative arc of progressive politics together with the Civil Rights Movement. With these inclusions it was found that President Obama discursively affirmed a shift in public opinion as well as the demographics of the American people. This affirmation also included the acknowledgement of the need for presidential words to reflect a more diverse national identity for the United States through a narrative of the people that emphasized the inclusion of different minority groups, be it of sexual orientation or race. With the narratives dealing with minority groups President Obama sought to emphasize the strength in the diversity of the American people, and that this diversity had played an important role in furthering progressive politics in the United States. Protest as much as unity was capable of changing the nation for the better, according to President Obama. Yet the problem of a narrative for the people in general, also emerged in the analysis of President Obama's rhetoric on the issue of the narrative of the people. The chapter concluded that it was a challenge for President Obama to define a narrative of the people that could include the 'new' groups of Americans without excluding more conservatively oriented groups of Americans with a different set of values.

In the case-study chapter that considered Barack Obama's use of the presidential narrative theme of nation, it was found that his invocation and revision of history through addresses to public memory was not only focused on presenting an alternative to President George W. Bush's rhetoric on the War on Terror. The focus in President Obama's narrative was also to confront the Cold War period and the United States' use of proxy wars among nations. On this issue it was found that Barack Obama approached the role of the United States in foreign affairs as a shift away from not only the status of lone super power, which the United States enjoyed in the '90s and '00s, but also

from earlier Cold War rationales on juxtaposed international relationships¹¹³. President Obama has instead focused on a reconfiguration of the United States' role in the world compared to both his immediate predecessor, as well as long held notions of American exceptionalism (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014). Furthermore, President Obama sought to distinguish the dichotomies of previous U.S. policies by referencing other problematic events in U.S. history that nuanced previous historic events and their meaning for the United States and the world community. President Obama has spoken more openly of side-steps and miss-steps in earlier political decisions made by the United States. Here, he has again signified a more open approach to narrative rhetoric, than for instance George W. Bush displayed in his narrativization of the 9/11 attack and its consequences for the United States and its allies (Salmon, 2010). It was also found in the chapter on the narrative of the nation that in his speeches abroad, President Obama continued his inclusion of other cultures into American culture, as he had done with minority groups in the narrative of people at home. In this way, President Obama expanded his personal narrative theme of inclusion of communities to a global stage as well as the national stage of U.S. politics. Yet President Obama also approached public memory with an editorial eye that extinguished problematic issues of racial violence, for instance, when this was needed in a particular foreign context. In this way President Obama did not move completely beyond the problematic use of public memory, where it is used to tie down specific histories, rather than open up for discussions of the ambiguous answers facing the present when confronting the past.

In the chapter that considered Barack Obama's attempt to establish narrative longevity for his personal and presidential narrative themes across his presidential campaigns the following findings were made: First, Barack Obama sought to establish coherence in his narrative of self by describing his role as president as an extension of his identity as a hardworking and caring family father. Michelle Obama supported this coherence by establishing parallel narratives between Barack Obama and her blue collar father in her DNC speeches. Second, the narrative of people was given even more autonomy in the 2012 DNC speeches by speaking of the political achievements in the 2009-2012 period of the Obama presidency as belonging to the people rather than the president. Third, it was found that there was a shift in the focus on the nation's progress, from one of a moral responsibility through references to the Civil Rights Movement in the 2008 campaign towards a

¹¹³ The crisis with Russia over the Ukraine and Crimea may, however, have long-term implications for this shift in Barack Obama and future presidents' narration of the Cold War period from the end of the Second World War to the Collapse of the Soviet Empire, and the subsequent relationship with Russia.

more progressive political frame of thought, with the emphasis on government's role in the lives of the American people in the 2012 campaign. This shift also included references to previous presidents' roles in this development, such as Presidents Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, while President Abraham Lincoln was referenced often in the narrative of moral responsibility in 2008. Finally the emphasis on the personal aspects of Barack Obama's narrative themes aided him in the 2012 election in maintaining the likeable identity he had achieved for his public persona in the 2008 election. The emphasis on Barack Obama's person helped insulate him from references to historically high unemployment numbers, for instance during the 2012 election.

Barack Obama as Narrator-in-Chief

While Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign was described as a "story-telling-machine" (Salmon, 2010), the initial quote in this dissertation by President Obama on his lack of storytelling as president, also shows that Barack Obama made changes in his rhetoric once he had become president. This consideration also relates to this study's initial question of how to better understand Barack Obama as a public speaker through his use of narratives.

One of the main characteristics of President Obama as a speaker compared to *candidate* Obama as a speaker was his shift from an emphasis on visionary rhetoric to a more pragmatic approach to the words spoken from the Bully Pulpit. *President* Obama's approach to the use of narratives also reflects his pragmatic understanding of policy. In his memoir, Barack Obama as a protagonist learned to adapt to new settings, and in his search for an identity, he found a balanced approach to the different communities, he belonged to, by accepting a permanent state of change in his identity. In the same way, Barack Obama adapted to the traditions of the White House, once he was elected.

The President's approach to political issues has been one of adaptation to each situation or issue at hand, rather than developing a clear doctrine on foreign policy for instance. This has caused political problems both domestically and with foreign policy issues. His openness to the function and process of governing posed both a challenge to the identity of the presidency itself, as well as the understanding of the people governed by it. To his supporters, the style represented a more mature and nuanced approach to the use of presidential rhetoric, while his detractors argued that he was undermining core American values, and thereby central narrative themes, of the United States and the presidency.

In particular, President Obama was criticized for lacking the ability to lead and bridge the factions of the domestic political scene in Washington D.C. He was also criticized for undermining

U.S. influence and the image of U.S. exceptionalism on the international scene with his historic references to U.S. foreign policy mistakes. President Obama used the presidency to vocally address relationships and past wrongdoings that have previously been ignored. At the same time, however, the great emphasis on historic balance for President Obama in his approach to events of the past hindered him in leading actual progress on some of these issues. Yet in spite of this approach to political rhetoric, President Obama was able to find a position as narrator where he balanced the traditions of the White House, with statements on minority groups such as homosexuals, Muslims, and African Americans. Perhaps President Obama's rhetoric and use of narratives has not helped him achieve the leadership role of "the decider" in the traditional sense, but he has been able to maintain an educational role as president, nonetheless. In Jonathan Alter's book *The Center Holds* (2012), Barack Obama is described as a politician who prefers to give speeches rather than negotiate, and his team believes that he has the capability to solve a crisis through a speech. For Barack Obama, ceremony and traditional speeches are valuable speaker situations, because he has trained himself to work within constraints and within an environment, where he has to adapt to the conformities of a community. Barack Obama's use of narratives is in its natural element in these presidential speaker situations, where expectations allows him to frame issues in certain ways, but also to break from them and present new perspectives and themes in light of the earlier framing. In this way Barack Obama adheres to the educational and value-based aspects of the modern presidency that we saw speechwriter Jeff Shesol present as the role of presidential rhetoric today.

For President Obama, it is important to show the act of listening, even from his advantageous speaker position. As the scholar Jason Edwards describes it: "The president argued that engagement included listening more, not dictating, to the concerns and needs of other nations." (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014, p. 145) This emphasis is also why it is relevant to speak of his rhetoric as a conversation with the United States, and its allies, rather than only as statements by the President. President Obama achieves inclusion through a revelation of the structure of narrative and through this openness around policies and decisions. President Obama's emphasis on dialogue and communal definition plays into the national conversation that is addressed in presidential rhetoric: Rather than presenting the final word and decision on issues, President Obama often seeks an open end presentation of different sides of issues, leaving the decision up to the audience on where to continue the narrative. This often leads to narratives containing ambiguous messages rather than clear-cut morals. In this way, Barack Obama, however, also elevates his audience to a more participatory role in his narratives than

his predecessors, where the president's narratives function more clearly as a means to set the agenda for the nation.

The Movable Presidency

While this dissertation has dealt mainly with positive aspects of President Obama's political rhetoric, there have also been a number of issues threatening his position as narrator-in-chief¹¹⁴. These challenges to the fidelity of the content in the narratives of the Obama presidency have not only affected President Obama himself, but also the character of the presidency itself. Yet while critics maintain that Barack Obama has been detrimental to the public and political standing of the presidency, both on domestic and foreign issues, there are also those who support his presidential style. The critic of President Bush's use of narratives, Christian Salmon, sees Barack Obama's storytelling as a less manipulative reflection of the United States as a nation in the 21st century compared to the image President George W. Bush presented to the public post 9/11. "Obama is much more than a brilliant "storyteller"; he is a strategist who appeals to the American subconscious. He has succeeded in turning his hybrid personality, with its heterogeneous points of biographical reference, into a metaphor for the new composite identities of the age of globalization. Obama holds out to a disoriented America a mirror in which shattered narrative elements can be put together again." (Salmon, p. 158, 2010) The image of the shattered mirror suggested by Salmon also reflects subjective questions of the narrative practice itself and the changes President Obama has proposed for the people and the nation in his narratives.

President Obama's post 9/11 reaction has been different to that of his predecessor. President Obama has spoken openly of the need for cooperation rather than building a fort in the minds of the American people (Faludi, 2007, p. 148). His community inclusion extends from his own background, and to both domestic and foreign settings, where he suggests a 'hybrid inclusion', as Salmon describes it, rather than a clash between clearly defined identities. Referencing the Nobel Peace Prize speech from 2009, the scholar James Kloppenberg points out that President Obama acknowledges that his rhetoric speaks to a fractured sense of previously held conceptions of the world: "As Obama put it when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on December 9, 2009, the rise of transnational institutions such as the United Nations, movements such as the demand for human rights, and the process of globalization have caused people everywhere to "fear the loss of

¹¹⁴ See appendix B for a discussion of the political challenges to Barack Obama's narratives and his role as narrator-in-chief.

what they cherish in their particular identities – their race, their tribe, and perhaps most powerfully their religion.” Balancing those apparently irresistible dynamics against the persistent appeal of local cultural traditions, finding a way to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable dynamic of the twenty-first-century world.” (Kloppenber, 2011, p. 3) Kloppenber’s comment on Barack Obama’s speech here pinpoints both the appeal and the challenge of Barack Obama’s presidency and his style of leadership in a 21st-century context. Whether speaking to a shattered national image or to a fractured sense of the world in general, the U.S. president must be able to address rapid changes in domestic and foreign relationships for the nation. He must also ask the American people to think anew more often than before the imagined identity they are to share with their fellow Americans. And in these tasks the president must also confront the role of the presidency itself as a leader of said nation and people. All of these issues relate to the history of the United States, and presidents before have addressed the issues of change by drawing on core values. Yet in a more connected world, and in a more saturated media landscape, there is today a need for words focused on the instability as an accepted part of the changes facing the nation. President Obama has at different moments attempted this articulation in the different themes of his narratives.

Perspectives and Implications of the Dissertation

This study has shown that Barack Obama can in some ways be seen as a transformative president, jolting the political value paradigm in the U.S., with regard to both racial identities and the relationship between the individual American and Government. He has done so, in a way that has not been seen since President Ronald Reagan. This potential for a shift in the perceived values of the majority of voters in the United States, and the basic relationship between the individual citizen and the government, were two of the reasons it was relevant to draw parallels between President Obama and President Reagan in an earlier chapter. It was also a reason to do the study of Barack Obama’s rhetoric in the first place. In narrative terms President Obama challenged both strong presidential and personal narrative themes of President Reagan that had appealed to a large group of Americans since the Reagan Revolution in the 1980s. President Obama tried to refocus the broad appeal of that movement towards a shared responsibility between Government and the individual, which could coalesce with his focus on inclusion of communities. Because of this goal for President Obama, it has been interesting to consider the epideictic and narrative aspect of presidential rhetoric as an important and defining strength of the rhetoric of the modern presidency, to shape the national conversation for the future, and change the frame of understanding on major

civil issues in American politics. President Reagan redefined the United States' view of itself and the presidency in many ways. In a similar way, President Obama has attempted this redefinition of previous conceptions into new ones with his own view of individuals, the people, and the nation. When considering President Obama's legacy and transformative quality as president, it is therefore not only relevant to consider what he proposed in his speeches, but also *how* he did so, where narrative rhetoric was one of the methods President Obama used.

Whether President Obama will be seen as the zenith regarding the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric, another narrative 'tent pole president' similar to Presidents Reagan and Bush, or if there will be an even greater use of narratives in presidential rhetoric post-Obama cannot be said at this point in time. As was suggested earlier, each president offers new personal themes and new takes on the traditional presidential themes, which they use to explore and understand the presidency in light of contemporary contexts. The rhetoric of future and past presidents will have to be analyzed with both presidential and personal narrative themes in mind to establish a more foundational view of how narrative rhetoric plays a role for U.S. presidents. This dissertation has attempted to present a better understanding of President Barack Obama as a narrator-in-chief. The case studies performed on his speeches as candidate and president, however, also open up for a more nuanced and detailed approach to the study of the use of narratives in presidential rhetoric in other time periods and contexts.

The concepts suggested and examples presented in the previous chapters of this dissertation, and the manner in which they were tested, are merely the tip of a vast field of rhetorical texts which could benefit from a similar attention to the use of narrative rhetoric. The possibility of going beyond U.S. presidential rhetoric also presents itself for scholars doing work on narratives in political rhetoric. Other nation states have leaders facing rhetorical dilemmas similar to that of a U.S. president. For instance, Danish political leaders, such as the Danish prime ministers during the past decade, have had to consider changes in their description of Denmark and the Danes in the light of the Economic crisis, the expansion of the European Union, and the future role of the Danish welfare state. All these issues require not merely political solutions, but also a frame of reference for the population to understand the intended changes enforced by the politicians. Narratives have and could very well continue to be the means to establish such a frame of reference. Beyond the national perspective, there are also pan-national needs for narrative studies of political rhetoric, as the example in the introduction chapter of the 2013 EU project "A New Narrative for Europe" showed. At the same time, a crisis situation such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and

President Vladimir Putin's use of history to justify his geopolitical annexation of Crimea (Putin, 2014), point to the further need of understanding the settings of competing narratives on a global scale. These examples and the issues involved in them represent possibilities for testing the concepts of this study in new contexts not applied here. The considerations to narrative as a term in rhetorical criticism presented in this dissertation will hopefully be of use in further research on the subject, and open up for future work that considers how narratives function at a public level of political rhetoric.

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Summary of "Narrator-in-Chief: The Narrative Rhetoric of Barack Obama"

The purpose of the dissertation is to show how the concept of "narrative" can be used in rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric, particularly when considering the speeches and the biographical text, *Dreams from My Father* (1995), of Barack Obama. The theoretical foundation of the dissertation is based on narrative theory and presidential rhetoric. The connection made between the two fields of research seeks firstly to clarify the use of narrative as a term within rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric, and secondly to discuss the role narratives play in the public communication of presidents.

During the election campaigns of Barack Obama and during his first term in office, the use of the term narrative became prevalent not only in the media and campaign language, but also in the academic field dealing with presidential rhetoric and campaigning (Hammer, 2010; Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010; Murphy, 2011; Salmon 2010). Yet these scholarly texts use narrative as a term in a broad sense, and without specifying what constitutes narratives in the form and content on political speeches. This dissertation therefore suggests the establishing of structural and thematic concepts to improve the understanding of the term narrative when used as a term within the study of presidential rhetoric.

While recent scholarship has dealt with the role of narrative in the rhetoric of Barack Obama, the term's relevance can be introduced earlier in presidential rhetoric. The 1980s saw articles dealing with President Ronald Reagan and the use of storytelling (Fisher, 1982; Lewis, 1987). Yet the use of stories of and by presidents in the White House can be seen as going further back in time, and as an essential part of the ceremonial role of the presidency. This use of narratives in epideictic speech has increased with modern day interests in the domestic life of the president, and the use of visual mass media as a communication platform for the president. While this has been described as a negative development (Stuckey, 1991; Salmon, 2010) this dissertation argues that narrative rhetoric should not be seen only as a negative part of political rhetoric, but also as a possibly vital way to educate the population on issues of national interest and to formulate common values for the American people.

Along with the theoretical and methodical discussions of narrative as a term within rhetorical criticism, the dissertation explores President Obama's use of narratives to exemplify the understanding of the term in a political context. This use includes themes of narratives of self, people, and nation. The narrative structures candidate and then President Obama used to establish his narrative themes include anecdotes of individual Americans, broad historical narrative arcs, and smaller narrative sparks in the shape of references to people and moments of significance for the public. President Obama uses these different narrative structures to draw together points in time, and to give voice to groups of American citizens within the United States that have previously not been acknowledged as part of "we, the people" in presidential rhetoric (Beasley, 2004). President Obama's approach to the narrative of the United States as a nation on the world stage also emphasizes a connection with the rest of the world, with an emphasis on inclusion of cultures rather than the moral contrasts of President Obama's predecessor.

The research done in the dissertation therefore suggests firstly a more detailed approach to the structural aspects of narratives in presidential rhetoric. Secondly the dissertation concludes through case studies of Barack Obama's rhetoric that he balances the elements of traditional narratives found in the presidential rhetoric of his predecessors with the introduction of new personal themes in the content of his speeches. Finally, it is concluded that the concepts tested on President Obama's use of narratives, can also inform rhetorical scholars working with presidential rhetoric in general.

Resume af "Narrator-in-Chief: The Narrative Rhetoric of Barack Obama"

Formålet med afhandlingen er at vise, hvordan "narrativ" kan bruges som et relevant begreb i retorisk kritik af præsidentiel retorik, særligt i forbindelse med Barack Obamas taler og den biografiske tekst, *Dreams From My Father* (1995). Det teoretiske fundament for afhandlingen er baseret på narrativ teori og præsidentiel retorik. Intentionen med forbindelsen mellem de to forskningsområder er for det første at klarlægge brugen af narrativet som et begreb inden for retorisk kritik af præsidentiel retorik, for det andet at drøfte den rolle narrativer spiller for præsidenters offentlige kommunikation.

Med Barack Obamas valgkampagner og hans første embedsperiode er brugen af udtrykket narrativ blevet udbredt ikke kun i medierne og kampagnernes sprogbrug, men også på det akademiske område, der beskæftiger sig med præsidentiel retorik og valgkamp (Hammer, 2010; Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2010; Murphy, 2011; Salmon 2010). Disse forskellige tekster bruger imidlertid narrativ som et udtryk i bred forstand og uden at angive særligt detaljeret, hvad der i indhold og form udgør et narrativ i politiske taler. Afhandlingen *Narrator-in-Chief: The Narrative Rhetoric of Barack Obama* fremsætter derfor en række strukturelle og tematiske begreber til at forbedre forståelsen af narrativet som et udtryk inden for studiet af præsidenters retorik.

Selv om der er mange eksempler på nyere forskning, der behandler narrativets rolle i Barack Obamas retorik, så kan udtrykket introduceres tidligere i præsidentiel retorik. I 1980'erne beskæftigede artikler sig bl.a. med præsident Ronald Reagan og brugen af storytelling (Fisher, 1982; Lewis, 1987). Men brugen af narrativer om og af præsidenter i Det Hvide Hus kan ses endnu længere tilbage i historien. Narrativet kan endda ses som værende en væsentlig del af den ceremonielle rolle for præsidenten. Denne brug af narrativer i epideiktisk tale er kun steget med den øgede interesse for den private del af præsidenternes liv og med brugen af massemedier som en kommunikationsplatform for præsidenten. Selv om dette er blevet beskrevet som en negativ udvikling (Stuckey, 1991; Salmon, 2010) argumenteres det i afhandlingen, at brugen af narrativer ikke blot skal ses som en negativ udvikling i politiske retorik, men snarere som en væsentlig måde at uddanne befolkningen om spørgsmål af national interesse og formulere fælles værdier for det amerikanske folk.

Sammen med de teoretiske og metodiske diskussioner omkring narrativet som et begreb inden for retorisk kritik udforsker afhandlingen Barack Obamas brug af narrativer for at eksemplificere forståelsen af begrebet i en politisk sammenhæng. Det hævdes i afhandlingen, at Barack Obama vedligeholder forskellige traditionelle narrative temaer gennem sin biografi og sine taler, såsom et narrativ om jeget, folket og nationen. De narrative strukturer, præsident Obama bruger til at etablere de narrative temaer, omfatter anekdoter om individuelle amerikanere, bredere historisk fortællende strukturer og mindre "narrative gnister" i form af henvisninger til mennesker og begivenheder af betydning for offentligheden. Disse forskellige narrative strukturer bruges af præsident Obama til at trække punkter i tid sammen for bl.a. at give plads til grupper af amerikanske borgere i USA, der ikke tidligere er blevet anerkendt som en del af folket i præsidenters retorik (Beasley, 2004). Præsident Obamas tilgang til fortællingen om USA som en nation på den internationale scene fremhæver en lignende sammenhæng med resten af verden, med tryk på inklusion frem for moralske modsætninger, som hans forgænger lagde vægt på.

Afhandlingen foreslår derfor for det første en mere detaljeret tilgang til de strukturelle aspekter af narrativer i præsidentens retorik. For det andet konkluderer afhandlingen gennem case studier af Barack Obamas retorik, at han balancerer kravene fra de traditionelle præsidentielle narrative temaer, der findes i hans forgængeres retorik, med indførelsen af nye personlige narrative temaer fra indholdet af hans taler. Endeligt konkluderes det at de narrative begreberne der er blevet udledt fra studiet af Præsident Obamas brug af narrativer, kan bistå retoriske forskere, der arbejder med præsidentiel retorik i almindelighed.

Appendix A: Rewriting Barack Obama's Narrative of Self

A number of biographies also deal with Barack Obama's personal past. They do so in ways that both cohere and differ from Barack Obama's own memoir. For this reason they will be briefly included here to show the editorial choices Barack Obama made with his memoir.

In the biography *The Bridge* (2010) Journalist David Remnick adopts Barack Obama's method of placing the protagonist within a broader historic frame. Remnick begins chapters throughout the book with information on how a certain incident in Barack Obama's life relates to the lives of African Americans as a whole in the United States. When Barack Obama runs for national office, his opponent is mentioned to be a former Black Panther. When Barack Obama decides to run for the Senate, we hear of the long periods where African Americans were not represented in Congress. And when Barack Obama wins the presidential election and is about to move into the White House, we are told that slaves assisted in the building of the house (Remnick, 2010, p. 355). Remnick ties these stories into the larger story of social change in the United States, much in the same way as Barack Obama tied his own story into that of the Civil Rights Movement (Remnick, 2010 p. 383). "He learned to make it an emblematic story: my story is *your* story, an *American* story." (Remnick, 2010 p. 18)

Right from the beginning Remnick emphasizes the conscious story-element there is to the description of Barack Obama's life. The many fantastic elements coming from having the whole world as his background story, the clear internal conflict served up for the main character with Barack Obama coming to terms with his own identity and background - as well as the increased velocity with which Barack Obama's life goes from event to event, act to act, chapter to chapter towards higher and higher goals with greater stakes and intensity. In this way Remnick's biography is a product of context, the 2008 election victory of Barack Obama, while it seeks to create context on its own by filling out the themes already present in the memoir with further examples and new details.

Another book dealing with Barack Obama before and after his election as U.S. president is James Kloppenberg's discussion of the thinkers that have influenced Barack Obama in *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (2011). Rather than diving into new details of Barack Obama's personal life, Kloppenberg's book seeks to fill out the narrative of Barack Obama through a more detailed approach to the intellectual tendencies that dominated the years Barack Obama spent at American Universities. In this way Kloppenberg's project is similar to Remnick's by making manifest the insinuated links that Barack Obama presented in the memoir.

For Kloppenberg, however, it is with an emphasis on intellectual history rather than the political and societal history that Remnick focused on: “My goal here is different. I want to focus on his ideas. Locating Obama’s development in the frameworks of the history of American democracy, the ideas of philosophical pragmatism, and the intellectual turmoil of the 1980s and 1990s reveals how Obama thinks and why he sees American culture and politics as he does.” (Kloppenberg, 2011, pp. xiv-xv)

Kloppenberg’s emphasis on an intellectual approach to Barack Obama’s background reveals a similar conclusion as other biographies on Barack Obama: “I think we should stop trying to differentiate the black from the White strands in American intellectual history. Obama’s writings demonstrate conclusively that his ideas, like the ideas of all American thinkers worth studying, have been woven from many different sources.” (Kloppenberg, 2011, pp. 252-253) For Kloppenberg the emphasis is on the philosophy behind Barack Obama’s governing style: “That approach to problem solving, rooted in experience and ever mutating in response to new problems, requires a willingness both to discard traditions that have become unhelpful and to continue taking instruction from those that remain vibrant and productive. Critics of philosophical pragmatism have charged from the beginning that pragmatists lack convictions because they refuse to embrace unchanging principles.” (p. 258) This is relevant to consider, particularly when discussing the relationship to the traditional narrative themes of the presidency that Barack Obama embraces, but also seeks to develop in different ways, for instance through his more open approach to the role of the president in the system of government and the power of the presidency.

Essentially what we can draw from Kloppenberg’s description of Barack Obama is a better understanding of his relationship to history and to governing philosophies. Among these is the belief in the possibility of bending the arc of history through a progressive approach, where slow and even flawed progression is acceptable rather than static status quo values: “...lasting reform occurs only slowly, and it can be consolidated only through patient and persistent persuasion, a willingness to admit mistakes and a tireless commitment to taking one step at a time. A thoroughly democratic culture is not characterized, nor is democratic change achieved, by swaggering certainty but only by a deeper humility, the Christian virtue that reminds Obama that all humans on all sides of every controversy, including himself, are inevitably flawed.” (pp. 260-261) For Kloppenberg then, the description of Barack Obama’s own intellectual journey can be transformed into a discussion of the development of democracy in the United States. The conclusion on this aspect of Barack Obama’s contribution to the American political process is the attention he gives to that very

process, rather than its results: “Obama understands that the power of our principles of liberty and equality depends not on the fervor with which they are proclaimed but on the deliberative process from which they have developed. That process requires us to debate, test, and revise the meaning of our ideals in practice rather than genuflecting reverentially before them. Only when we affirm the process of continuous and open-ended experimentation do we affirm the principle of democracy.” (Kloppenber, 2011, p. 265)

A more critical biography of Barack Obama can be found in Dinesh D’Souza’s book *The Roots of Obama’s Rage* (2010). D’Souza’s biography illustrates that Barack Obama’s detailed presentation of his personal past in the 1995 memoir and subsequent use of this personal past in the 2008 election campaign, has not necessarily created a more solidified narrative of President Obama as suggested by for instance Remnick’s book *The Bridge*, or by theories on biographical narratives such as Phillip Hammack’s article on Barack Obama’s “life narrative” (2010). Instead ambiguity still surrounds Barack Obama’s narrative of self in the view of D’Souza. D’Souza, however, uses *Dreams from My Father* as a main source for theories on the president’s current political motives, while at the same time denouncing Barack Obama’s credibility as a truthful source of past events. This contradictory approach to Barack Obama’s memoir leaves D’Souza’s own book vulnerable to criticism. Yet the publication’s probing of Barack Obama’s personal past for a different reading of President Obama as a politician is useful when trying to understand the polarizing aspect of President Obama in the White House.

D’Souza picks apart the historic links that Barack Obama makes in his memoir between his own life and U.S. history such as to the Civil Rights Movement. This way of criticizing Barack Obama is prevalent in discussions of his memoir. Anecdotes are found that Barack Obama does not describe clearly enough, or seems to elaborate on in comparison to real life events. But D’Souza’s critique overlooks that Barack Obama himself states in the memoir that these problems are inherent when approaching the past, and Barack Obama acknowledges repeatedly his personal view of the past being described.

D’Souza’s book may be too conspiratorial to be taken seriously by mainstream media, but it is relevant to briefly incorporate in this dissertation because it represents the alternative interpretations that can occur of Barack Obama’s multivalent narrative of his personal past. Barack Obama’s own plot holes and recognitions of the subjectivity of storytelling exemplify that Barack Obama’s narrative is one that can be changed by other writers to fit their view of the candidate and

president. The strongest appeal of Barack Obama's narrative, its adaptability to contexts, is paradoxically what is used against him in publications such as D'Souza's.

David Maraniss' biography on President Obama, *Barack Obama: The Story* (2012), places itself between D'Souza's biography on the one hand and Remnick's and Kloppenberg's publications on the other. Maraniss acknowledges the plot holes and compound characters in Barack Obama's own memoir. Maraniss, however, does not question the validity of the memoir because of this, as D'Souza did. Instead Maraniss suggests his own elaborations and clarifications to the memoir's events and characters. In this way Maraniss makes additions to Barack Obama's narrative of self, which also influences the themes that can be drawn from Barack Obama's past.

Seemingly disparate elements are tied together by Maraniss into a teleological thread that leads Barack Obama to the White House. While such a historical arc can strengthen the narrative presented by the politician in the present, it is also relevant to point out that such historic links can be overstretched and end up undermining the narrative arc rather than strengthening it. Maraniss presents a number of minute details designed as destiny drenched tidbits for the reader, so that Barack Obama's road to the White House seems preordained. Maraniss for instance ends his biography even earlier than Barack Obama's own memoir ends. Maraniss in this way does not touch directly on the Obama presidency. Instead he leaves the time as president in the vagueness of a destiny filled future, as an unseen light house shining back on the trail of Barack Obama's life and showing his route to it. Yet without taking Barack Obama or the reader all the way *to* the light house.

Maraniss' biography then is focused on the person of Barack Obama before he became president, yet constantly Maraniss justifies his biographical project through the many connections and premonitions he sees in Barack Obama's life and the life of his family to the destiny that awaits the President. In this sense the book is interesting when considering how a narrative of a life is constructed by a biographer, because it deals with the past without incorporating the present directly (since the present is still being formulated). But the occasion for dealing with the past of the protagonist comes from the present not dealt with.

A Personal Narrative up for Grabs

The value of examining these different biographies is not only to briefly present the diverse interpretations of Barack Obama's memoir and the additions made to it. The different narrations of Barack Obama's life in some ways cohere with his own approach to the narration of his past, since he acknowledges the subjectivity of the project. The researcher Scott R. Stroud has also written

about this paradox of narratives that can hold numerous truths instead of a singular truth as purported by Fisher. In his article *Multivalent narratives: Extending the narrative paradigm with insights from ancient Indian philosophical texts* (2009) Stroud describes how traditional narratives, in spite of their lack of coherence, probability of their details, and fidelity to each other still represented truthful narratives for the communities that told them. The narratives therefore also needed to be considered as having an impact on the audience's view on their own life as well as the life of the characters in the story. The same goes for the life described in a biography and the contemporary person standing at the end of such a contemporary life narrative. For Barack Obama, his ethos as a speaker was both strengthened by the different truths to his narrative of self in the 2008 election cycle, yet also made the narrative open for critique by his opponents who sought out their own truths based on the memoir. The view of Barack Obama's narrative self, therefore, depends on the context of the narration and the audience's sense of fidelity to other narratives told to them by the media presenting Barack Obama's narrative of self.

Appendix B: The Challenges to President Obama's Narrative Themes: Four Issues

The negative issues that have emerged regarding the Obama presidency not only hurt him politically but also 'struck' at the fidelity and coherence of his different narrative themes. First, the call for bi-partisan cooperation in U.S. government in Barack Obama's 2008 campaign was never heeded by Congress. President Obama's grand bargains across political lines never came to pass. Even his achievements during the first two years of his presidency, when the Democratic Party held majorities in both chambers of Congress, have been contested throughout the following years. President Obama, therefore, never became the reformer of the political system that he suggested he could be in his speeches of the 2008 campaign. President Obama's rhetoric, in reaction to this development, has gradually become defensive in nature with major addresses such as the State of the Union speeches in 2012, 2013, and 2014. In these speeches President Obama began to present the conflict he was part of in Washington D.C. more directly than he had done previously in the traditional speeches of the presidency. His second Inaugural Address in early 2013 could even be said to *challenge* his political opposition, rather than include them in the post-election celebration of his presidency, as the traditions of the speech suggest (Jamieson and Campbell, 2008 p. 32). The challenge constituted his emphasis on an even greater public inclusion of previously 'ignored' groups of Americans in his narrative of people.

Second, while President Obama can claim grievance with his political opposition for not collaborating with his policies at a historical level, the deteriorating relationship with the U.S. news media is more controversial for his narrative theme of inclusion. While candidate Obama offered a more open relationship to the press as one of the goals of his presidency, this has not come to fruition in his presidency. One aspect of this strained relationship is the information scandals relating to leaked documents by Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. This has established a difficult position for President Obama to argue for more openness towards the public, while having to maintain a satisfying level of security for government documents. Yet both the content of the leaks and the U.S. Government's reactions to the leaking of the documents have been in contradiction with Barack Obama's personal narrative theme of transparency.

These different crises during Barack Obama's time as president did not affect the view of Barack Obama as a person for a long time¹. The President was always presented by his administration as being at a distance to the events that formed the scandals, even regarding the sanctioning of surveillance of foreign leaders. This, however, had the effect of not just protecting President Obama from the scandals, but eventually also suggested a lack of knowledge and control

by the presidency over the different agencies of government. This can be seen as the third issue that challenged President Obama's narrative themes. The idea of the "Imperial Presidency" (Schlesinger Jr., 1973) has in the view of some scholars become antiquated, and instead the identity of the presidency should now be seen as containing a number of challenging burdens that hinders the president as appearing imperial in his powers (Vaughn & Mercieca, 2014). This perception is perhaps the issue that is most damaging to Barack Obama's ethos as president. As discussed earlier, the role of the presidency has developed, in a broad historical arc, into the role of the "decider" rather than as a presiding "manager", as it was originally intended. The image of the decider is what President Obama initially tried to move away from in his presidential rhetoric by being more open about the deliberation that occurs on issues and legislation, as well as the needed compromises rather than clear victories. The risk with this approach was that the doubt that was inherent in such deliberation was difficult to display publicly without risking appearing as a 'weak leader'¹. This has been a clear leadership challenge for President Obama in his willingness to tell 'multivalent narratives' by arguing different sides of issues. Whenever President Obama has backed down on issues, expressed doubt, described more than his own view of a problem, spoken of the limits of the executive branch, or simply changed his mind, it may have been with a focus on the outcome of the situation, rather than the image of strength in the presidency. Yet the image of success is, in some instances, valued more than actual results, when evaluating the role of the presidency. This has worked against President Obama, as much as it has helped him during the election periods.

The fourth issue that has presented a challenge to the fidelity of Barack Obama's narrative themes is the War on Terror and the moral pitfalls the conflict has presented for him as president. The response to 9/11 presented President Obama's predecessor, President Bush, with similar dilemmas, just as previous war crises have presented U.S. presidents with some of their most challenging dilemmas in terms of the use of their presidential powers and the expansion of these powers. Although President Obama stopped the official use of the term "War on Terror", received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, effectively ended the active U.S. military presence in Iraq and set a course for the same to happen in Afghanistan, and avoided new large-scale military conflicts in Libya and Syria, other problems relating to the "Overseas Contingency Operation"¹ have dogged the Obama presidency. President Obama was for instance not able to close the prison at Guantanamo during his first term in office. While the other political decisions mentioned above have had an impact on a much larger group of people, the Guantanamo prison's symbolic power has remained a problem for President Obama, particularly because the closing of the prison was one of

his more direct campaign promises in 2008. President Obama has gradually given up on being able to close the prison through his executive power alone. In his 2014 State of the Union address, he essentially turned over responsibility for the closing of the prison to Congress: "And with the Afghan war ending, this needs to be the year Congress lifts the remaining restrictions on detainee transfers, and we close the prison at Guantanamo Bay – because we counter terrorism not just through intelligence and military action, but by remaining true to our Constitutional ideals, and setting an example for the rest of the world." (SOTU, 2014)

President Obama's description of the power relations between the presidency and Congress exemplifies the troubled development between the branches of government during Barack Obama's presidency. Yet even more controversial, from a moral standpoint, and in this way also in terms of narrative values, is President Obama's increased use of drone strikes. The use of 'kill lists' on presumed terrorists, disregarding the collateral damage at the time of killing, has set a precedent for coming administrations to either increase, follow, or attempt to scale back the policy (as President Obama himself has already tried to do)¹. Yet the American public in general supported the practice of drone strikes, as pointed out by journalist Jeremy Scahill in an article for the Huffington Post: "A 2012 poll found that 83% of Americans supported Obama's drone program, with 77% of self-identified liberal Democrats supporting such strikes. The Washington Post–ABC News poll determined that support for drone strikes declined "only somewhat" in cases where a U.S. citizen was the target." (Scahill, 2013)

These policy developments on security and intelligence issues are also part of the challenges to President Obama's narrative themes and the representation of a presidential identity emphasizing openness. Instead, President Obama has ended up with an entrenched Washington that has forced the two narrative worlds of the Republicans and Democrats up against each other in a fight that has become more ideological, rather than less so, since President Obama took office.

The above examples are just some of the political issues President Obama has seen challenge the fidelity of the narrative themes he has tried to uphold during his presidency. While his reelection can be seen as President Obama's ability to maintain narrative fidelity with the voters reelecting him as their national narrator, the second period for President Obama, thus far, has presented even greater challenges to the fidelity of his presidential and personal narrative themes. While this dissertation has focused on aspects of President Obama's rhetoric, where he to a large degree has achieved some measure of success, such as the inclusion of minority Americans in presidential

rhetoric, the problems facing President Obama in his second period as president will also have an influence on the narratives of his presidency, once he has left office.